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ABSTRACT

Taken from the book "The Language of Primary School Children," this essay is an example of the dialogue among teachers in England about language and writing. The essay gives priority to the discussion of actual material produced in primary schools and highlights the most promising ways in which language was seen to play a vital part in learning. The material, dating from the late 1960s and gathered as part of the Schools Council Project on Language Development in the Primary School, is placed within a framework of controversial themes and theoretical issues reflecting teacher militancy. The essay treats teachers at work, different kinds of writing, and the question of audience and the individual voice, and presents samples of students' writing to illustrate the varieties of writing and to provide contexts for the discussion. (JD)

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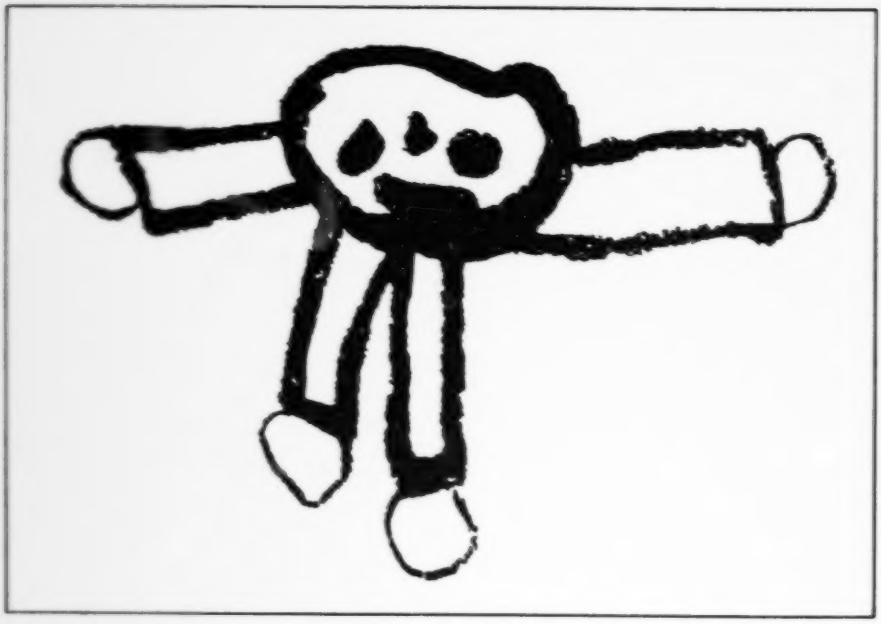

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Connie Rosen

WHAT ABOUT CHILDREN WHO CAN'T: ON WRITING

University of North Dakota
Grand Forks, N.D. 58202
September 1983

In November 1972, educators from several parts of the United States met at the University of North Dakota to discuss some common concerns about the narrow accountability ethos that had begun to dominate schools and to share what many believed to be more sensible means of both documenting and assessing children's learning. Subsequent meetings, much sharing of evaluation information, and financial and moral support from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund have all contributed to keeping together what is now called the North Dakota Study Group on Evaluation.

A major goal of the Study Group, beyond support for individual participants and programs, is to provide materials for teachers, parents, school administrators and governmental decision-makers (within State Education Agencies and the U.S. Office of Education) that might encourage re-examination of a range of evaluation issues and perspectives about schools and schooling. Towards this end, the Study Group has initiated a continuing series of monographs. In addition to discussions of evaluation, the series includes material on children's thinking, children's language, teacher support systems, inservice training, the school's relationship to the larger community. The intent is that these papers be taken not as final statements but as working papers, written by people who are acting on, not just thinking about, these problems, whose implications need an active and considered response.

Vito Perrone, Dean
Center for Teaching & Learning,
University of North Dakota

Preface

For changes of substance to occur in public schools, there needs to be more than the political possibilities for moving the members of the schools' complex community into action. For teachers to even begin to search for alternatives and to break away from the notion of the structures of the school as being fixed and inevitable, there has to exist an example of change within the structure of compulsory education. Particularly for progressive American educators, this is what has given such significance to the experience of English school practice. It is not that the English schools are perfect; far from it. But English practice has held out a vision of the possibility of change because it has, in fact, managed a better match between what they provide children in school and what young children need to be provided in their effort to make sense of the world in which they are growing up.

Over the past 20-some years, through persistence, American public school educators have made substantial advances in understanding what teachers and children do when they are together and as a consequence there are to be found around the country hundreds of interesting classrooms--interesting not just to observe but to work in, particularly with the aim of learning about language and how language relates to learning and living. On the other hand, the places are few and far between--and in this country that could mean a good bit of mileage--where the breakthroughs have been anything but on the surface of everyday practice; where the questions surrounding change have gone deeply enough to affect schools structurally; where the teaching and the research, the learners and the teachers, have made a kind of interpenetrating whole where things changed because they belonged to each other. Those teachers in England who can claim this kind of accomplishment for their schools would be the first to argue that they are only at the beginning of what they need to do (they would also acknowledge feeling the futility--no matter how deep their understanding--of trying to keep working-class children, the main body of children served by the schools, interested in school-based learning, when the economy holds out nothing to them but low-paying dead-end jobs--although even as they made that observation, they would persist in what they were doing). But in

terms of seriously thought-through beginnings, and in terms of the facility with which English teachers question their day-to-day practice, particularly concerning the disciplines of writing, they are to be envied for the dialogue that they have opened up amongst themselves.

In teacher-initiated, teacher-run publications of the most varied kind, teachers in England talk to each other, share their experience, give each other a sense of the value of their work, and challenge each other's thinking--challenges rooted in what they know of, and respect about, children's lives. They reach out to acknowledge and work with community publishing, thereby extending their own resources. They push each other to write themselves. They persist in their questions even when there may be no answers. Answers are limited, change from time to time and situation to situation, as one teacher wrote recently, but some questions are permanent.

The Language of Primary School Children, from which this monograph is taken, is an example of this English dialogue about language and writing, albeit an extraordinary one. And while it is some 10 years old, few if any of its social or pedagogical references are dated, or should seem strange to American teachers. In fact, it zeroes in on present concerns here. Based on a large collection of material gathered over the years as part of the work of the Schools Council Project on Language Development in the Primary School, it gives priority to the discussion of actual material produced in primary schools, and selects for attention the most promising ways in which language was seen to play a vital part in learning. But it did it importantly by placing this material within a framework of controversial themes and theoretical issues at a time, in the late 1960s, of great teacher militancy. The meeting of that militancy with concern for what teachers know and what teachers do, such as expressed in what follows in these pages, still affects discussions going on, more than a decade later.

"Children belong in their homes, with their parents, with their community," Connie Rosen wrote in 1972. "It takes a great deal for the institution of a school to add something to all that is of such vital importance to a child. Yet there are schools and teachers who are doing precisely this. Now that we know that such things are possible and can see the unmistakable evidence, we can see that some schools do much more than make children happy and welcome; they actually transform their ways of thinking and feeling. Nowhere is this seen so clearly as in children's writing." Ten years later it is not so uncommon to find teachers collaborating over long periods of time to observe classroom processes and to consider--with deep sense of purpose, having experienced growth and change--the implications of what they find. "I want to put one

item on the agenda for our possible consideration," concluded a teacher's discussion of school practice in a recent issue of an English teachers' magazine. "That is, that we look at structures with the same kind of attention that we have previously brought to products and processes. There will always be good tapes, thought-provoking pieces of writing, intriguing examples of children approaching texts. I often have a sense of those things as salvaged artifacts, salvaged from the breathless haste and confusion of our everyday lives. Once we have agreed, for instance, that a piece of group talk shows evidence of children engaging with previously abstract areas of knowledge, and once we have discussed the social and linguistic processes which go on, once we have investigated that talk, the important question that presents itself, and it is a structural question: how can we create structures which will allow that language activity to become a representative, rather than an exceptional, part of our working lives? In order for change to bite and hold in the schools we work in, we need to ask questions like that."

Arthur Tobier

The book from which this essay on children's writing is taken, *The Language of Primary School Children*, is one of the outcomes of a project initiated by the English Committee of the Schools Council (of England). The project was entitled *Language Development in the Primary School*, and was run for two years, 1969-71. Mrs. Connie Rosen was appointed its director (and only full-time worker). The project plan was somewhat unusual and can be summarized as follows:

1. The director would 'seek schools where, according to present assumptions, good work was to be found.' She would collect materials which would show the range of language actually used by children in the 5-11 age range. These materials should also exemplify the 'best current practice' in the schools. Primary school teachers should be involved in the initial process of selecting and collecting.

2. The examples of language use would be examined in the light of 'theoretical understanding which is becoming available from current projects.'

3. Materials and examples should be disseminated to local groups of teachers and teachers' centers in order to foster local discussion, experiment and development work.

4. It was assumed that the long-term effects of the project would include the creation of participant groups of teachers 'prepared to feed back comment and continue with the work of clarification of aims and purposes.'

The full text of the book was published by Penguin Books (England, 1973). We are reprinting this material (Chapter 3 of the book) with the publisher's permission.

Writing

It is easy to think of many reasons why a young child should not want to write and very difficult to think of reasons why he should. Even more baffling is the problem of what a young child thinks he is doing when he is writing, other than submitting to the will of adults and putting writing in the same category as potty training, kiss grandma and grace before meals. Why should he want to put on paper (or via paper) what he can so much more easily say directly? Whatever doubts may be expressed about the curriculum, no one questions that writing should be taught in school; writing, like reading, belongs to school. All parents are concerned about literacy and feel they know whether schools are getting on with the job. And literacy is so obviously marketable and such a clear investment (for the secondary school, for a job, for life), so the argument runs, that inspectors, advisers and even professors of education who have never taught anyone to write share the concern and possibly create some of it. Add to this that writing presents a variety of difficulties at different levels, from the sheer manipulative problems in handling an implement to questions of organization and adjustment to the particular forms of the written language. Small wonder then that teachers, intimately aware of the possibilities of failure and of how manifest that failure is, should be affected to the point of anxiety. We have become more and more aware of children's talk, and teachers have a sense of the inadequacy of some children's talk, of the inarticulate child, and of hesitancy, but so far talk has not been subjected to the same kind of scrutiny or measurement as reading and writing. Writing, however much we have come to appreciate content and personal involvement, can be seen to be either accurate or inaccurate, and numerous spelling or punctuation errors in a child's work seem to indicate unmistakable school failure.

As I proceeded through the first year of this project gathering material, talking to teachers and visiting schools, it became more and more evident that underlying all that I was doing was the question, what we do about the children who can't. I often visited teachers who would ask children to do the Monday morning "essay," issuing a title such as "My Weekend," or "My Dad," or "A

Visit to an Interesting House," and without more ado the children would begin to write. And, however unreasonable I might have thought the task, however much I stirred a few sluggish thoughts in consideration of what I would write in such circumstances, there were always children in the class who were able to produce highly competent pieces of writing. But these were the children who can. The teachers were taking advantage of the fact that these children bring to school a cultivated literacy and with it a strong sense of the written language and its possibilities. Whether such subjects and such teaching are suitable even for the most gifted or most confident children I very much doubt, but at least what was achieved was a high level of competence with some who could produce brilliance at the drop of a hat, and the few stragglers, who weren't going to go to the grammar school anyway, were left meandering about at the bottom. At least this is what would happen in schools in well-to-do suburbs. Needless to say, in many schools this way of going on cannot even be contemplated.

I might have taken examples of such brilliance to adorn this report, but I was asked to look at and describe examples of good practice. As soon as one focuses on the teacher, it is inevitable that one moves to the next step to ask what the teacher has done to make the task possible for all children, across the whole range of ability. This imposes quite a different strategy from the handing out of an "essay" title and expecting a quick return. What do we do about the children who do not respond in that way? What do we do to create in school the cultivated literacy which some homes provide? It is hardly surprising that I saw this question underlying my own investigations. It is the question in most teachers' minds, and it is the question that has been presented to us urgently since the Newsom Report and the Plowden Report. The question may be more urgent in some areas than in others, and a few teachers may feel complacent as they teach children who have no difficulty with school subjects, but the majority of teachers who face the majority of children also face the problem of how to raise the general level of children who do not take easily to school subjects or who are not so aware of what it is in their own lives that is acceptable in school. When we shift from talking to writing (reading, too, of course) we are moving to a school-taught language behavior and as with so many school-taught things we meet with frequent failure to learn. I am not saying that when it comes to literacy many children can't, only that many children don't.

Perhaps I might begin at the beginning with the youngest children in school and consider their initiation into writing. One headmaster remarked on children's writing that the youngest children in school, in infants' classes, take to writing fairly easily and naturally. They like

it, enjoy doing it and take pleasure in the achievement. He thought this attitude changed as the children got older and only the minority of children of ten or eleven will turn to writing for themselves by their own choice. It was an interesting proposition. I think I know what he means. I am sure many infant teachers could point to children who do have considerable difficulty in managing a pencil or who find the task distasteful or tedious, nevertheless the headmaster's comment was basically right. I have certainly seen many, many children in infant classes who take up pencil and paper with great zest and confidence, and who take it for granted that observations, comments, stories, anecdotes should pour off the tip of the pencil on to the paper with little pain and anguish. I do not want to underestimate the difficulties nor make light of the kind of teaching that has contributed to making such a task pleasurable to young children. There is a great deal to learn from this initial teaching that could be applied later on in school for children who continue to need support and help.

It's hard to find a beginning in primary school because whatever one sees at any particular moment has been preceded by something else. There is a flux, out of which one snatches some small item in time, and something torn out of context can never really be fully explained in itself. However, let us assume that once the child is capable of making a recognizable drawing and has reached a stage of competence in shaping letters, he is ready either to have something written by the teacher under his drawing or to write something himself. He makes an offering like these, given to their teachers by some five to six-year-olds:

A frankenstein boat

William

This is my spider patter. I write with my pencil in my book.

Paul

A fish want to eat.

Antonia

The girl and the carpet and the church

Antonis

This is Antonis he is a policeman and his sister

Antonis

The moon man is laughing at Jill and Mary playing out in the snow.

Serpil

This is a dustbin
There is a long train
The airplane is going to London

Sandra

Here is a well full of water

Cherry

The policeman's road

Vyay

Here is a whale in the water

Annette

Three speeding boats and a man crossing the road and Ronnie

Sean

There are two puppet men
A very good house
A sunny sherbert house
Here is a hat man

Julia (four separate entries)

This is a girl who like the snow
This is Ronnie in my garden and the sun is coming out
This is a car and a spider worm and a girl

Maria (three separate entries)

Gabrielle wrote,

The eagle is flying holding a man

which was inspired by a story. Later she had a grand collection,

Mollie has a rocking horse and a sheep and a cat and a teasel and a doll and a man and a house and some flowers and a cat and a dog and this is my doll.

These children were all in the same class. There is good reason for the variety of the children's names. They are children in a London infant school that has a dozen different nationalities, many of the children having only recently learned to speak English.

Even from the beginning it is assumed that the children have something of their own to say. They have had a thought, drawn or painted it, and then comes the talk with the teacher. This must be recognized in our treatment of older children who may be having difficulties with writing. It was significant, for example, that one headmistress said that she asked a child what she should

write under his painting. He then began to say in a very stilted voice "This is a boat . . . ." She was so taken aback by the ventriloquist kind of voice coming out that she immediately changed her question from "What shall I write?" to "Tell me about your picture . . . ." The child immediately relaxed and said, "Well, you see, Miss. . . ."

Each child has been given an opportunity to offer an explanation of his picture or to identify it in some way for someone else, and also to shift from talk about it to writing. The shift must entail a drastic reduction though it often is a sharp concentration. They choose what to put into their pictures and the same choice is given them to supply the captions. It is worth looking at this stage in some detail, because there are many children at the transition stage from infant to junior school who have difficulty, and who do not receive that kind of close individual care and attention. Take the example of a seven-year-old who had written half a page about his bicycle and a construction kit he had been given. I read it through, or rather guessed it through. He asked if he had it right, and seemed both pleased and surprised that I had managed to decipher it. I said I could understand what he meant. It is questionable whether with such a degree of inaccuracy, the task is worth doing. A tape recording of what he had to say would be far more manageable. Though he was seven years old, he was really at the stage of the younger children, but either the expectation had been created that he should write a news item of at least half a page or he wished to emulate the children around him who were accomplishing the task with little difficulty. But such children are really in an intolerable situation; they either place themselves, or have been placed, in a position of failure, and failure is an ever-descending spiral. The infant teacher's method is to listen and help children select some item that is most significant to them and then to help them to write it. Children of seven, eight years old, and even older, need the same kind of talk, support and tailor-made individual attention that the infant teacher gives to the youngest children. Class sizes in primary schools and conditions of work still remain ridiculously out of keeping with the kind of work necessary, but given that both infant and junior schools are both grossly understaffed, what else do we need to learn from the infants school? Organization? Use of materials? Ways of ensuring that children are fully occupied while the teacher is occupied with some or one at a time? Or does it all rest on attitudes to children in difficulty?

The following are some pieces of writing from fives and sixes from another school. They show something more advanced than the first selection. They are already shifting the balance away from pictures. Indeed we do not

need pictures to follow them because they have a complete unity of their own. Some of them show more strongly the influence of stories read or heard. The writing process has been sufficiently mastered to enable the writers to get down the more complex sentences available in their speech. They write about the things they see around them, they make up stories, and one of them is able to confide a troublesome problem to paper.

There is a black night and he is in charge of the castle.

Andrew (5 years)

My cat went sliding on the snow. He went as far as the garage.

Paul

One day I went into the wood. When I saw a fox and I chased him away.

Helen

In the house was a dancer in the house she was dancing.

Heather

The castle is a war castle. The king and queen lived in this castle there was not any war men becos they all be cilt

Garry

Frances (aged 6+) turns over a serious problem;

My sister has short hair and a big face and my sister never plays with me and when she does play with me she never plays the way I want to play.

Alison (aged 6) has a different quality in her writing. She wrote these three pieces at different times:

The frosty morning
The leaves are nearly off the trees
The trees are nearly bare
Winters coming
The leaves have a tingling line of white round them

Today the sky is gloomy murky dull dark white its going to be a dull day

The early morning
Sun rises
up
up
up
rising until it is
up in the sky

then it gets very
hot all it is really
is a ball of fire

Alison composes a poem and gives it a pattern on the paper like the sun rising up, but many, many more children than we realize possess this quality of using language freshly, of saying "the leaves have a tingling line of white round them." The world is so totally new, everything is interesting. A chair can become a throne or a ladder or even a bed, and in the same way a tingling feeling can become tingling lines. This adaptability and flexibility is part of their thinking. They have not set their patterns of thought, of expectation, of predictability. There is considerable hesitancy, a constant state of assessment and reassessment and a constant arrangement and rearrangement of their thoughts in search of meaning, shape and coherence. Writers are able to reshuffle the set meanings of words, to challenge the predictability of meaning, to shock and surprise, but in order to do so they have to return to the young child's openness, freshness and naivete about language. Young children are not poets nor can they survey in a critical and conscious way what they have achieved, but the poetic quality of their language is usually a source of great delight and pleasure to parents and teachers. It was with some dismay that I heard teachers complain about a child's description of smoke, "We don't say 'smoke came blaring out' (which is what the child had written); blaring is used for sounds. When are they going to learn the proper words?"

In talking, as we have seen, young children invent all the time. Their limitations in language push them to invention, sometimes enabling them to say things which the resources of English have not provided for. The slow process of writing, unlike the rapid spontaneity of speech, gives them a chance for a more pondered invention. Inventions which are discarded will be replaced by words they know to be right for their own meaning, not "proper" words but words properly selected.

The youngest children bring their own ideas far more readily and easily to school and the following pieces of writing from Mark occurred over a series of days. Each item was written on a separate day. They write artlessly about the things they have noticed and thought about and assume that what is in their heads will be acceptable in school:

I once fand a bottle floting on the warte it was a plastick one and I was just going to thro it back in and I saw apeese of pappa insid it it was a mesig abode this flud in three houses so I went and tod the ploes and they seid thad be there rit away

It was so hot yestday that we cod hardley put up the tent we have got a tent it is a green one just big anuf for John me and Catherine.

I went to the zoo it was London zoo There war snaks and lisds and ckrokdils and barids and hrblist of the lote what we thot was hroblist of the lot was the Ant etar.

I went to a cavran site at half term. It was about 6 yards long and the sents made into beds and there was an extra bed and anutar bed on the end. It had hundreds of drors and cads and the name of it was Mildmay
A thrian went by and wen it did the trafic lits on the road went on at the same tim the trafic lits on the railway went on and the lits on the road went off but the lits on the railway stad on.

As the oney story I no I did not have any tea. I did not do enything I went to bed. I went to my music listen yestday I did not get eny stars if you get a stars you get a sixpence.

I am a ant. Wen I woke up I fond I had six little babys. They were nise like me and then we all went outside and then a big gint cam a log so we all went balk into the house and anuth gint came and we were clld.

Mark, 6 years

As children get older they become more self-conscious, more inhibited less inclined to talk and write in this kind of way and they themselves will censor out a great many such reactions as unsuitable or too childish. They will feel even more convinced if the general climate of the classroom is such that one writes poetically about certain acceptable topics and writes informatively about others. Moreover teachers often feel they can make their most direct contribution by fastening on to such recognizable areas for instruction as spelling, punctuation, grammar and vocabulary items.

The question of children using written language for their own purposes and of maintaining confidence in their own "voices" is one that presents itself not only in the introductory stages but all through primary school. I have recorded examples of good practice which show how some teachers I met were able to do this. The first comes from an infant school which provides a very rich environment of books, animals, plants, materials of all kinds and encourages a great deal of music. When I visited the school there were a variety of Carl Orff instruments in the hall and Frank, aged seven, was standing in the hall playing some music. He was working on a tune for his poem:

I see a feather quill
I see a waving green pencil
I see a tall church window
I see an arrow head
I see green candy floss
I see a moving tree
I really just see a tall poplar tree.

He had written poems before, read them for himself, and had composed pieces of music before. At some moment he had looked at the poplar tree--one could see it just outside the hall window--and had wanted to make a song to it. He could only do this because he already knew about making songs. I heard a teacher in a junior school say that his children were very free to work on their own throughout the day. There was indeed a very happy, very pleasant atmosphere in the school, and the children were busy and confident. If, however, one examined what they were doing, they were really spending most of the day reading and writing. They were children of that sort. They were doing the kind of things in school that their parents expected them to be doing and that the children had understood was expected of them. They were choosing their own topics to read and write about and were choosing their own groups. But in the end they were unaware of other possibilities, because these had never been presented to them. The kind of choices available to Frank writing about his poplar tree were not present for the older children. How does one account for the very elusive yet all-pervasive atmosphere which led the older children to spend most of their time writing factual material, but led young Frank to writing an expressive piece on the poplar tree? It isn't just that younger children cannot handle factual material for I have been in infant schools where a great deal of emphasis is placed on that kind of work, but expectations (and opportunities) of what is appropriate, desirable and acceptable are so easily conveyed by teachers. Frank knew about making poems and making music and about looking at the poplar tree.

A group of five and six year olds from a school in Newham in London were taken for a walk by the river. Their writing, paintings, drawings and collections were mounted and put on display in the hall for other children to see. I transcribed the writing and reproduce it here:

By the river

The pylon carries electricity
It's taller than you think it is.

David

There was one train going along the rails high up
The other was low down. They passed one another.

Paul

We threw blackberries in the water
Circles came out. They kept getting bigger and bigger.

Ian

We floated Paul's boat. It got stuck in the weeds.

Mark

The blackberries floated down the river.

John

A bee was caught in a web but it fell off.

Beverley

The spider covered the butterfly with its web so
it couldn't get out.

John and Mark

We found some dandelion clocks. We blew them and the
seeds flew away.

Jane

It all sounds very rural but the children live near the docks, and the river in London is not quite as idyllic as it would seem from the children's writing. Another group were taken on a train journey and wrote about their impressions in the following way, some of the work being dictated to the teacher and some written by the children:

The Train Journey

The man said for two shillings you can have this train.

This is us waiting at the station for the diesel train.

We went on a train and train driver let us out through his cab.

The driver turned a knob and the engine made a loud noise and it went.

We went underground it was dark it was noisy.

A big train was going slow the man waves to me. The train was pulling apples and pears and organes. They had pictures on the trucks.

We saw a train pulling some trucks with new cars. It was very windy when it went past because it was going very fast.

These children, like Frank with his poplar tree, have shared an experience provided by the teachers. They have talked about it all and each has written about the aspect of the walk or ride that interested them. The most significant feature of both the "Walk by the River" and the "Train Journey" is that the children have recorded their own individual impressions. Beyond all question they have been made to feel that what they wrote was a decision for them to make and whatever seemed to have meaning and significance for them could be recorded. Why do I feel that these brief sentences have a freshness and variety which so often melt away when children get older? After all, looked at through hostile eyes they could just as easily seem banal and bare. I think it must be that they are so closely focused on the detail of life, detail which in more sustained pieces of writing children begin to omit because it is no longer savored by others. Yet such pieces would probably be improved by their inclusion. Take that vivid image, "A big train was going slow the man waves to me." There is no overt expression of delight or satisfaction but it is powerfully suggested. There can be no doubt, however, that given the assurance that their own observations are important they have each turned their attention on something different. The teacher who has contrived the whole situation has at the same time surrounded it with that assurance which must have been present during the experience as well as after it. As children get older their teachers begin to feel the need to shape their development in a very directive way either towards "creative" writing or towards informative writing. In either direction the adult model looms large and sharp differentiation is imposed on children's writing. My own impression has been that the most interesting work throughout the primary school is *relatively* undifferentiated. Restrictive choices and the imposition of a fixed way of treating a theme limit the maneuverability of young writers and handicap them in their efforts to explore with language. They must be left free to write in a way which shows how they feel about things. In the process children will write in different ways, but only rarely will they be in conformity with highly differentiated adult models. I say write in different ways, and that puts it rather vaguely but that is because we lack both a theory and the supporting investigation to be more precise about the different forms of writing in the primary school. The terms usually used are totally inadequate. This is a matter of such importance that I shall need to return to it.

I

SOME TEACHERS AT WORK

Some teachers have more of a feel for language than others, and literature plays a significant part in their lives, but there are very few indeed who do not have a capacity to make a valuable contribution. Indeed it is my experience that many teachers have increased their awareness and understanding of language through their experience of working with children. Teachers also learn from each other. What can we learn from some of the teachers I have met and corresponded with?

Some of the children I quote in this chapter are of considerable ability who bring talents and personalities which need relatively little nurturing from the teacher, though it must be stressed that much of the work I quote was initiated by teachers in an atmosphere delicately and thoughtfully created by them. We all know talented children for whom school is a frustrating bore.

There are many children in schools who have responded to the teachers' initiatives in ways which would be inconceivable in a less stimulating environment. But this is not easy to record, much less to measure. If the observer finds it difficult to seize on precisely what features of the busy classroom are the crucial determinants of progress, then he should remember how much confidence is required from teachers to go on working in this fashion, often in the teeth of hostile criticism. Nowhere is it more difficult to keep faith with oneself and in oneself than in those schools where many children have difficulty with "school work." When the apparently "deprived" children rise to over 50 percent in a class, the teacher is likely to become anxious and worried. The schools at the centres of our large industrial cities are in a peculiarly vulnerable position. Consider then the following letter from a teacher in a Belfast School:

Nearly all the writing done by these seven-year-old children is related to their environment and own personal experiences. These children come from a very limited background, and I have found that they write with more feeling and fluency about things/places closely connected with them.

Perhaps when they are older and can read more widely, they will begin to write more in the fantasy line.

I read both poetry and stories regularly to the children, and I have found this stimulates them and has helped them to develop a "feeling" for poetry. They are always keen to attempt writing a poem on any subject. The writings--"The saddest moment of my life," "A shock," etc. are all true experiences that happened to the children, and I think consequently a note of sincerity runs through the writing.

The poem "The worm" *was written after direct observation and discussion. While observing the worm struggling on a piece of white paper, some suggested it looked like a bundle of gravy rings. When it moved and coiled up, someone else said* "it now looks like a knot on my lace"--*and thus we arrive at the finished version of the poem.*

Writing on colors is perhaps a progress towards more imaginative work. Again visual aids were used to stimulate, e.g. reading poems from "Hailstones and Halibut Bones." *While writing about the color orange we looked at an actual orange, tasted it, looked at sparks from a fire, a Halloween lantern, sunrise, etc. all this entailing lots and lots of oral discussion. . . .*

She attached the following pieces of writing from the children.

Belfast at night

All alone high up on Monagh Road,
There's Belfast below--sprawling like a dead monster;
There's its head looming up to the sky;
The big crane soaring over the little ships.
Lights red, blue yellow, green twinkle in the black mist;
Cars roar in the distance.
That's Holmsies dog probably chasing the ball:
People's footsteps miles away
Hurrying into the night.
The Man's voice booming in the Bingo Hall--
"Legs eleven, seventy seven,
Key of the door, twenty-one."
The smell of fish and chips:
Gas escaping everywhere;
Turn around and there it is--
The Black Mountain like a dark cliff
Bent over ready to fall on me:
Only the red TV light blinking friendly
The white moon hanging on its top.
How I wish I was there standing all alone.

Linus, 7 years

Black

Black as the night like a frightened boy.
Run, run try to escape:
Black as coal like down the mine.
Run, run, try to escape.
Black as a haunted house, like a giant charging me
Run, run, try to escape.
Black as a shawl, like a witch's cloak at night
Run, run, try to escape
Black as the smell of things burning;

Like hell on a dark night
Run, run, try to escape.

John, 7 years

My first day at school

Boys shouting, boys rushing, what a noise
I stand clasping my mummy's hand.
"Please don't go, mummy,"
Slowly a boy takes my hand, leads me to my room,
What a noise: boys crying wanting to go home;
Then a little boy asks my name,
"David," I says. "Brian," says he.
Now that boy is my best friend.

David, 7 years

The silver knight

There he stands like a gleaming god,
Spear in his hand ready for war.
He makes me think of a charging horse;
I am afraid to meet him in the dark.

Thomas, 7 years

Turf Lodge

Houses crushed together, traffic roaring all the time;
Children shouting, fighting, playing
That's Turf Lodge.
Thank Heavens for the Black Mountain
Flowers, trees and river.
Seagulls crying in the morning looking for food,
That's Turf Lodge.
Playing football at Norglen Parage,
Hide-and-seek in the crowded street
Jumping from the walls trying to escape,
That's Turf Lodge.

John, 7 years

The Worm

Horrible slimey creature, wriggling on the page;
Rearing it's head like a fiery dragon.
It's body like a row of gravy rings
Now it is long and thin reaching for my hand.
Dirty reddish brown like mud and sugar mixed.
Can you see or hear I wonder?
Now it's coiled going madder and madder.
Suddenly still like a knot in my lace.
Dead, I think.

No, not yet.
Back to your home you go.

John, 7 years

Orange

This is my favorite color.
A Hallowe'en lantern burning in the dark.
The long slender corn blowing in the wind
Under a golden sun.
The blaze of a fire on a winter's night,
A juicy orange dripping on my tongue.
The leaves in autumn all beautiful orange.
Orange makes me think of an explosion in the night.
Orange is the zippiest color of all.

Joseph, 7 years

Without getting involved in talk of *"deprivation"* and *"disadvantage"* and all the assumptions which go with such language, we can say, quite simply these children come from poor families, families whose earnings are low, but we are not making the common assumption that economic poverty implies psychological poverty. There is no longer any need to explain that they also live literally and metaphorically in the crossfire of the communal dissension in their city. A glance out of their classroom window shows them a burnt-out bus, boarded-up windows and slogans on the walls. Many of their fathers are unemployed and their homes are overcrowded.

One could easily describe such a school in such an area as a *"priority school"* yet the writing gives an indication of an atmosphere and work going on in that school that cannot, unfortunately, be repeated in all *"priority areas."* One of the things the teacher said to me was that the children had a feeling for language that her own children did not possess. The school is a Catholic school in a Catholic area and the teachers and head have a sense of community with the children. They do not regard them as creatures from another world with a different set of values. But the Belfast teacher also has a sensitivity to and appreciation of the children themselves. The children felt this and responded to it. Children will quickly sense even if it is not made explicit that the teacher is ignoring or under-valuing what they have to offer and is demanding what they cannot and do not wish to do.

A teacher in a school in a new town said she tried to have children *"dredge into themselves for what they really have got--what images they themselves have got. . . ."* She thought that children at primary school age are very imaginative, that *"something uninhibited in*

their make-up produced this quality," and all depended on *"how far children are interested to meet the teacher's own personality and interest."* It was in her class that I saw a child, Keith, aged eight, go out and paint a winter tree. When he returned with the painting, she said to him, *"What does it remind you of?,"* he replied, *"Like skeletons against a black sky."* Later he wrote for his picture:

> Bare trees in winter, like skeletons against black sky.

In the same class Peter aged nine and a half had written for his picture,

> Clouds drifting across the grey sky.

She had taken the statements from the children and put them down, just as the infant teacher will take the offerings of the youngest children. Neither of these children, Keith nor Peter, found writing or reading easy to do, but they weren't expected to cover sheets and sheets of paper. Far more important, the teacher was helping them to believe in themselves. She later sent me two group poems which the children had composed together.

Snow

Snow flutters quietly
Covering the ground like white butterflies
We walk through the cold crunchiness
Leaving our footmarks
with the small spiky footprints of the birds.

Group, 6-9 years

A teacher in a Yorkshire school facing similar difficulties with children had by the end of the year helped children to write the following pieces. The class was a *"remedial"* group in a school with a three-form entry and they were described as the bottom 28 in a group of about 112. Though what might be called a remedial class in one area might not be regarded as remedial in another (we should note that this was a school on the edge of a big city). The teacher was responsible for a great deal of the movement work throughout the school and the written work is built on similar assumptions to those of the last teacher whose work was quoted.

A foggy morning

As I walk up to school I fastened my coat up it was very damp. I tramped along very slowly and felt uncomfortable. I looked around but I could see nothing but fog It felt

as though I was going to walk through a solid wall. I was very miserable I saw lots of spiders webs which looked very beautiful. The fog smelt terrible it smelt like rust I felt as though I was locked up in a prison. I saw a figure in the fog. I watched it until it disappeared. It was a greyish color. At last I got to school.

Angela, 11 years

Running in the wind

The wind whistled through my hair and blew it all about. The wind was trying to slow me down. I tried to break lose. Suddenly the strong wind stopped and was a soft breeze. It felt as if there was a soft blanket touching my face. I started to trot back but then the strong wind came back so I started to run my fastast trying to beat the wind.

Gregory, 11 years

I like watching a swallow build its nest in the shed. The swallow builds its nest with a mud surrounding and lines it with straw and feathers. I like watching the swallow because the swallow is colorful. It swoops for the flies. The swallow has a forked tail and it looks light and it makes flying and gliding look easy. It comes back to the nest year after year.

Allen, 11 years

I like to make dens out of grass, but first I like to watch the tractor come round and cut it. When it comes it looks like a monster eating the grass and anything in its way. So I get out of the way before it gets me. When it has gone I go and get all the grass all in one pile. The smell of the grass is like perfume and when I pick it up it tickles and drops through my fingers. Then I make a den out of grass. When it is made I go inside the den.

Gary, 11 years

I like running through the grass and listening to the rustling and cracking. Then I like to think I am very posh and strict. I walk quietly and gently on my tiptoes to creep up on the others in our family. I also like watching how the children run and jump. They strech their arms and legs as though they were reaching out for the sky. Their bodies are like a picture that is moving all the time. They look very easy and graceful.

Julie, 11 years

I like watching my mice because I thought my mice were either two girls or two boys but I was wrong, it was a girl and a boy and they had babies. Now the mice have opened their eyes and are walking about in the cage. They go up a ladder and play on the wheel. Some of the baby mice get stuck and so they fall through the hole in the wheel. The baby mice are black and white and are just like big lumps of soot, soot that is wriggling.

Lorraine, 11 years

The small leaves of the chickweed are shaped like tiny lemons, they hide the minute white flowers. Looking through the lens the leaves have the appearance of a lawn on a spring morning laddered with dew. Each tiny flower has ten petals and five sepals which are pointed making the flowers look rather like a star. Each flower is surrounded by buds which are covered with hairs and when they all are in flower they look like little patches of snow. The purple stems of chick weed is sleek and is covered with tiny hairs which are like a baby's hair when it is first born. The chick weed is really a cruel flower because it creeps and crawls like a sly fox stealing hens and if it starts growing on lawns it will gradually smother the lawn.

Christine, 10 years

We have been looking at the work of children who are often represented in current discussion by indecipherable scribblings or a few barely readable, desperate sentences. I cannot pretend to diagnose with precision why some schools can reach the point where their pupils can write like the Belfast children and others cannot. Nor do I think the remarks of the teachers tell the whole story, though they provide us with strong clues. They are not in the least concerned with "kinds of writing" but with giving a priority to that language which needs no external processing but which tries to do justice to the felt experience of the writer. Linus at seven years of age can assemble his complex picture of Belfast as no geography books can do for him, undaunted by the ambitious topic. Christine (above) can linger over the chickweed leaf long enough to discover that it is a "cruel flower." The variety of the themes and points-of-view reveal how dangerous it is to work to some stereotyped view of creative, or any other kind of writing. What the teachers have sensed is the need for the children's language to be turned upon everything in their world, not only such experience as the school and classroom have to offer. They have not been hampered by categories which in their turn restrict the children. "Imaginative" has not been narrowed down to "imaginary" as it has in the classes I saw where the children wrote about nothing but witches,

ghosts and monsters. Nor have they felt that observation can only be verbally expressed when a child writes alongside an object of convenient size and assembles data. Nor do they feel that information can only be found in books. Variety there will be, but it will grow from the engagement of the children and what they are learning. There is usually more variety in the freely chosen writing of ten-year-olds than that arising from tasks proposed by a teacher on the basis of some limited typology.

Possibly the majority of teachers want children to write about things that matter to them and would be delighted if their pupils did so, but many find that their efforts result in impoverished repetitive pieces. I suspect this is due to the fact that they want to make a direct assault on the problem rather than examine the kind of lives they live with children throughout the long school day. It is not likely that the sort of writing which we have been looking at and which arises from circumstances usually regarded as unpropitious would emerge from an allocated timetable period labelled "creative" or "personal" or "imaginative" writing. That sort of writing is not a lesson or subject but a way of looking at life and therefore a way of living.

We all yearn for planning, sequence and continuity in our work. I have seen planned curricula from overseas which look like telephone directories and in which every moment of a child's day in school is budgeted for. What cannot be budgeted for is what is happening to individual children. *Their* focus is always on common tasks, common materials, common outcomes and common activities. In written language work this is likely to take the form of topics or themes proposed by the teacher. Our shared humanity ensures that many children are able to respond to such assignments and some very well. As we have seen, a teacher who understands children well will explore areas with them and leave open how the children take up her initiative. But no teacher can hope to know the particular anxieties, fears, delights, passions, curiosities and obsessions which are dominating the lives of children at the moment. The problem then is how the teacher cannot only make room for writing about such things but also create a climate in which children sense that such writing is acceptable and know how to make use of the opportunity provided for them. If we do not or cannot make this provision then the lesson is soon learned that vital preoccupations and the most deeply felt moments of life have no place in school, which is reserved for school matters. Or if they are accommodated only when the teacher is ready for them, the moment may have passed or not yet come. Some schools are able to transmit to children not so much by declared intent as by their openness and acceptance that when they have something to write they will be left in peace to get on with it.

I want now to take a closer look at the work of two teachers with ten- and eleven-year-olds. From each I catch the scent of the highly individual approach, but if I believed them to be setting about the whole business of writing in a way which was so idiosyncratic as to be non-transferable I would scarcely be reporting it here.

The first is a teacher from Birmingham, whose school was built in the last ten years and which serves a housing estate on the edge of the city. The fathers of the children in her class work mainly in skilled and semi-skilled jobs in engineering and in the car factories and many of the mothers work too. Mrs. V., the teacher, is particularly interested in literature and poetry and has succeeded in interesting the children in reading a great deal for themselves. Apart from her own reading to the children, she also uses radio and television programs. When I visited her, I asked her if she could possibly record some comments for me on her teaching, and she wrote to me:

I find difficulty in putting into words the situations that sometimes give rise to lively, observant and truthful writing. But I'll try. Centrally always is talk and discussion among the children, guided now and then from above (literally, because the children sit in a group on the floor).

After reading Robert Frost's The Pasture, *the children talked about things they loved to do most, could hardly wait to get at. They observed in their talk how often there were other things (imposed on them by adults) needing to be attended to first. There was an atmosphere in the classroom of excitement, of wanting to be off, and "blow the jobs, mum," when Linda wrote, "Let's Hurry" ("while needles of grass made rashes of red freckles on our bare skin").*

The children heard the poem, The New Boy *by John Walsh. They chatted about "new" experiences in their lives, about strangeness and loneliness about how they felt when rejected, even while presenting a "don't-care" face, about going first into an empty house. Pieces of writing emerged like "Ears for my Family" by Christine, "Loneliness" and "The New House" by Gary.*

Some writing that I found pleasing came after talking about how rhythm can convey an idea, and this was linked with talk on people's jobs. I read part of Tennyson's Morte d'Arthur *(talked of rhythm conveying Sir Bedivere's state of mind when taking Excalibur to the lake). I read also Auden's* Night Mail, *and the children talked of an engine driver's work. They then wrote of the work of someone they knew personally, of work that had been personally, acutely observed.*

I wonder if these random thoughts are of use or interest?

Here are the pieces of writing to which Mrs. V. refers in her letter.

Let's Hurry

Sunday morning,
still no peace, mum's calling--
Do this, do the other.
Which must I do first?
My head's whizzing
Really I'm not listening
Linda and I will soon be off to the park--
"Can I go now?"
Come on Linda Theresa
Can you smell the damp green smell of
the bank by the swing?
We'll roll all the way down,
Feel the spikes of grasses sticking in us like
needles.
We'll close our eyes.
And feel we are bobbing in the air like hand-blown
bubbles
Our heads rolling and rolling
While needles of grass make rashes
of red freckles on our bare skin.

Theresa why are you dawdling?

Linda, 11 years

Ears for my Family

"I'm coming"
Wind pushing and tugging at me
hugging my hair
scrabbling my clothes
"I want my tea"
But all is quiet
I stand straining my ears--
not moving in case I miss something
It's like a ghost house
only a creak of the stairs
and a stretching of the floor boards
I am fixed to my sea--
my ears large
The gravel path scrunches under heavy feet
A scratched key scuffled in the lock,
stamping, coughing--it's dad:
Heavy shopping bags thump on the floor
Tins clank together. I wait for mum's deep sigh.

Christine, 11 years

I

Loneliness

Loneliness is a stream pouring down the mountain,
Splashing and swirling like a whirlpool
plunging lower and lower until splash
it joins the reservoir and slowly dwindles away.
"It is nothing at all now
Loneliness is black
The thick heavy darkness full of
white specks at night
loneliness is the countryside gazing
empty, back at you in winter
I feel dazed and lonely
All is dark inside my body
The world is night.

The New House

When I got there
It was all strange, misty
Suspicious and silent
There were builders in the distance
Working away at somebody else's new flat
but nobody else was here except me
I crept in quietly, the house wasn't my friend yet--
It lay all silent and misty around me
The quietness was booming in my ears
Everything looked new, smelled fresh
of paint and new wood.
Mum and dad were slower than me and weren't in sight
yet.
I kept on wondering if the house would want us.
We would soon find out.

Gary, 11 years

The Factory Worker

This ordinary woman
Works in the factory up the road
Putting bolts in the drill
She presses the pedal that starts the drill working
The clashing and the grinding
The clicking and the shuttling
Are soothing to her ears,
Filling her arms with rhythm
Her head with day dreams
The siren sound.
And my mother faces the world again.

Anthony, 11 years

I copied out from the classbook these pieces which show more fully the variety of work in the class:

The knife slides through the polystyrene
As my dad carves a goldfish
Smoothly the oiled blade cuts
Hands that last night were rough and clumsy
As they tore up the floor boards
And cut through thick cable to lay beneath--
Today these same hands
Are gentle and delicate as they carve a goldfish
His face is all screwed up.
All he sees are his moving hands
He does not even know I'm there
Now, as I watch,
A small, perfect goldfish forms.

Ian, 11 years

As we walked

As we walked and talked
Through the park
On a hot summer's day
The sun glared down on us
And spotlighted a tiny flower
Surrounded with weed, foliage buttercups and daisies--
Dying with age.

David, 11 years

Through the grass

In the grass
On a patch of dry soil
Run insects by the score
A mass congregation of small multi-legged creatures
Climb a precipice of grass
Bees and wasps swoop to the honey suckle
The sun beats down on the glittering dew
Summer is here at last.

David, 11 years

The Army Ant

The army trudges on and on
Hardly stoping to rest
Walking through the hot days sun
Hunting for some unlucky animal
Leaving decaying rotting bones
On through sticky jungle pathways
Over moulds of dried up earth
And on through forests of huge green blades
Trudging on and on
On and on

David, 11 years

Big Wheel Dare

"Oh go on, do it" they said
I shut my eyes
"Why am I worried?" I said
I stepped into the big wheel
The wheel revolved
We are at the top now
How I wished to jump down
Ants swarmed around below
How I was glad to reach the ground
"Don't know why you didn't come
It was great," I said.

David, 11 years

Boy in a tree

The rough, rotted bark
Scratched and scraped inside my knees,
I reached for the rope on the top branch
The wind took it farther
from my stretching fingers
It would make a smashing swing
Suddenly the leafy tops of the tree feathered out
the trees ran
the grass came up to catch me
Smack. I hit the ground.

Keith, 11 years

That moment

I squatted on my fishing basket
waiting for a fish to eat my maggot
The water wrinkled every time a perch curved
up for air,
When a stray leaf floated down,
When my float bobbed a bit.
The water looked like my granny's face
The grass was all still
My nose was full of the wet smell.
A bird landed lightly on a branch
and I saw the little branches sway--
My float bobbed under--a fish was after my maggot
I reeled in the line,
and held my perch in my hand.
It wriggled as if a feather would tickle my hand
softly
but his grey-speckled back was rough
His gloomy eyes stared at the water
as if he had never seen it before.

An eleven-year-old

The daisy

Out comes the sun and beats down on the earth
Then she stirs from her sleep
Opening her face to the sun
Her snowy white fingers are reaching out to the
  glowing ball
The day wears on
The sun retires
And the daisy steadily closes up.

Carol, 11 years

The wind

Slanting branches
some flying
In front of the magic wind

A swarm of leaves
flying over my head
and small sandstorms
by every building site.

Garry, 11 years

In space

I'm travelling faster than anything on earth
I look down over the sea
Twirling and turning amongst the stars
I shoot through the dark black sky
And I travel on,
the stars becoming my guides
And as I look down I see the mountains clinging
  to the earth.

Trudy, 11 years

The rose

The bud on the rose. The bud grows
  with the mud
Then the leaves shake and flutter with
  the air around the world
The rose is like velvet.

Paul, 11 years

The class is a B stream in the fourth year and as usual there is a range of ability represented in it. The pieces of writing were copied and corrected into a class book. Many teachers have heard and discussed these pieces of writing, and many of them said that they too

asked for corrected copies and they felt that, provided the task was not too arduous, it is better for children to see each other's work corrected and presented well. Most teachers I have seen know the difference between careful presentation and an over-insistence on getting absolutely everything right. It was common practice among the teachers I visited to help children while they are at work, and when the writing is going to be made public a fair copy is made. But not everything is copied out in this way and children are given opportunities to write for themselves, if they wish, untroubled by editorial demands.

Others have commented on the sensitivity of the teacher and her ability to touch aspects of the children's lives which they themselves would not always be aware of or think worthy of attention in school. One teacher in particular said she thought that Mrs. V. was helping children towards the individual expression of feeling and thought that would not necessarily be fostered at home.

Teachers have also commented on the children's sense of poetry and the influence of poetry on their writing. The phrase, "As we walked and talked . . ." for example in David's poem is a line taken straight from a poem the boy had read. When considering what kinds of models we are presenting to children, we should look at the range in writing. It is not, I believe, a question of the difference, let us say, between a personal anecdote and an account of harvesting on the Canadian prairies, but rather the place of the writing in a continuum which stretches from talk to book-language. Imagine a line drawn from talk to the language of books, and then place children's writing somewhere along the line. The youngest children's writing is nearest to talk though rarely exactly the same as it. Older children who are less sophisticated will tend to stay nearer to talk in their writing than children who read a great deal and become influenced by literary forms and structures. Mrs. V. is able to encourage the children to make their own associations and connections with the poetry, to make discoveries for themselves about themselves, and to find their own place along that line. If a child has enough incentive to commit himself to writing, it is then up to him to find his own mode of saying it, that is, the children find the form that is appropriate to what they want to say.

Clearly there are important lessons to be learned from this teaching. *The teacher is able to follow the fine textures of a child's life and is able to help him to interpret it.* She gives a kind of prestige to what would otherwise be overlooked by the children, and to the kinds of discoveries she is helping them to make about themselves and others and their relationship with people.

She says her aim is "observant and truthful writing" and she not only achieves this with the children, but has given them a way of interpreting life for themselves and a tradition of writing for themselves that has more chance of surviving than an everlasting insistence on writing to a formula. Though the writing remains personal, the children's language is being extended and challenged, not only by the poetry and stories she makes available to them, but also by the quality of the thinking she invites. The depth of the response involves the children into a consideration of motives, feelings and ideas which they would not have ventured into on their own. The children are also presented with poems and other literature not in order to copy and imitate them slavishly but to enjoy them in their own right and, therefore, at one and the same time as sources of new ways of saying things. Some children are obviously more profoundly touched than others. But she is prepared to bide her time, not expecting a quick return for something read, but patiently waiting for the emergence of more adult forms when all her work has taken effect. There is nothing wrong in a child taking a line or a word from a poem and using it for himself if he himself chooses to do so; it is *his* decision and he shares the practice with poets. It must be serving his purpose. It is quite a different matter to ask a whole class of children to write in the style of Dylan Thomas or Virginia Woolf. Just possibly this exercise may encourage them to be sensitive to the writing of others, and there is certainly no harm in reading such extracts and talking about them. If, however, writing to a model (let's all be Dylans today!), becomes too frequent in class, we are in danger of excluding the children's own imagining, their own resources in the language, and of conveying to them that their own expressive forms are inferior to the adult's. Highly verbal children are particularly vulnerable to the cultivation of tricks and techniques. We are above all underestimating the rich potential of their own expressive forms and decreasing the range and choices available to them. Finally, Mrs. V. assumes that the children do have experiences, feelings, ideas, thoughts and a way of talking and writing about them. Sometimes it is assumed that, when we talk about experiences children should have, we are thinking of visits abroad, to theaters and museums and a variety of stimuli in the home like books and music and friends. I would not underestimate such experiences, but it is necessary to understand the scale of a child's life and to develop the kind of sensitive antennae that this teacher possesses in order to give validity to the stuff of children's world, "mum's deep sigh," father making something with care and delicacy, the feeling of a new home, etc., etc.

Many of the things we talk of encouraging in children--confidence, initiative, self-esteem, self-awareness, observation, honesty--are worked out in practice by this

teacher. There is much to be learned from her and others like her.

The other teacher is rather different. He is a young man in his first two years of teaching and I recorded in some detail the work done in his class during the first year of teaching. I have tried to illustrate this work mostly through the work of one boy, Christopher, but have also drawn on work from other children from time to time. He works in an unstreamed class of ten-year-olds in a school in Buckinghamshire. The school serves two housing estates, one of council houses and the other owner-occupied (about fifty-fifty). Some of the writing arose from visits around the school. Early in the year there was a visit to the local church. They did some brass rubbings, made some plans of the church, looked at books on architecture and wrote about these things.

The bell tower in St. Leonards church

To get to the bell you had to go up a metal ladder from in the porch. When I got to the top I had to go through an old trap door. I got through and into a little room. It was little because the works of the clock were there. The clocks penalum was swaying. It was about teo feet long. coming through the roof were teo ropes. They were to ring the bell. They had special handals. I tuged a rope and the bell swayed but not enough to ring. From there I went up a flimsy lader. There was a hole in the wall and a cold draft was coming through it. At the top of the lader was a very big wheel atached to the bell. It was on the floor. Ian and I could get in together.

Christopher, 10 years

They went on to visit a local pig farm and the woods. The woods became a topic for Assembly, having for its theme "The world beneath our feet."

When I saw a harvestman spider

I rolled over a log and I saw a harvestman spider. It was shy and began to run away on its eight long flimsy legs. It had a minute body and great long legs like stabilizers. He was very light and hairy like. He soon ran back under the log. It crawled right under and came out the other side. Then it clambered in the long grass and got lost.

Christopher

A Conker

Bulky yet prickly
on a windy day he would sway up in
the tree top
comfy is he in his warm shell
High and dry
He rubs his big fat belly on his outer case
Rainy, windy and blustery
But still he ceases to fall
Day after day he would sway

Christopher

Later in the year they visited what they called the bull field and pieces of writing came out of that.

Bulls

Standing all day in one position, just chewing up the cud with their neck bent down they rip more and more grass up. Then the occasional flick from their tail to dispose of any absent minded fly. Then at the end of the day, they have a drink and just lie down where they are just anywhere and go to sleep.

Christopher

In a field the bulls are crunching the fresh green grass or basking in the sun. Suddenly a lot of children creep up near the bulls, trying not to look suspicious. They knelt down to sketch the bulls. Then bulls start to surround them, but we discover their plan, so they slowly walk away to leave them crunching the grass in the field.

Ian, 10 years

It was black and white and was like a jigsaw. The black blended with the white as he moved his hevey head as if to say "no go away" or I will carger with my thrusty horns" "Oh" I said, "so you think that I am afraid of you."

I stamped my foot down to the ground and the cow took a sudden step backwoods with fright.

Anne, 10 years

The visits are milestones in the year's work not only for the class but for other classes in the school. Anyone can see that these visits are not charged with the dramatic lure of the zoo or Madame Tussauds or the Planetarium. The children are taken to look at what is close at hand and under their noses day in and day out. But they

are taken to see how much is there! It's like kicking over an old brick that has lain by the garden path for years. And they go on to make something of it in a variety of ways. Writing will be one of those ways.

The children get a sense that the things around them are significant, are worth paying close attention to and worth stopping long enough over to record in some way. The effect of the teacher is like the effect of a companion who stops to examine the wording on a notice. We stop too, infected by his absorbed curiosity. Schools that use the environment in this way are in the minority and they also tend to be schools where a stroll out of the school gates gives easy access to farms or fields or lanes or river. Much less use is made of an urban environment even by schools close to rivers and canals. By urban environment I mean dirty old towns or acres of council houses. I have been told that children aren't interested in what is familiar and in the things they see every day. But they do not always notice what there is to be seen. We cannot only bring the child's world into school, legitimize it as the sociologists say, but we can also enlarge that world by enabling children to look at it in a new way. We have to begin by giving generous opportunity to re-explore what is apparently well-known. Schools vary considerably in the extent to which they give opportunity for this kind of work, and an examination of how much time and importance is given to such things is very revealing. Such work is often regarded as a waste of time when the children could be sitting in their desks reading and writing. Yet all the talking, reading and writing that accompanies a local visit are likely to be more significant than writing which stems all the time from reading. The read-about-it-write-about-it treadmill can sum up what typifies school for many children.

Children who may be able to do very little with the bare verbal context of a book may be able to talk and write with interest and motivation about bulls in a field or a boat passing by in the river or the scrap-metal yard next door. The context here is a richer one of events and people and the evidence of their own senses. However interesting books or television programs may be to children, there is need throughout the primary school for a great variety of first-hand experiences and there can be no substitute for this. Teachers need to be convinced of its value and be prepared to work with the children's way of learning. We may ignore all their discovery and exploration of the real world and say that schools are concerned with reading and writing and arithmetic, but we may be leaving the most important aspects of their learning to chance. And we have good reason to know that chance is very kind to some children and harsh to others. Everyone knows that children need fantasy too, and we shall come to that in due course. But in some schools

the threat of Gradgrind has so far disappeared that it is reality which stands in danger of being ignored.

The teacher in the Buckinghamshire school not only arranged visits but within his classroom he created an environment which complemented them. (Indeed this was true of the school as a whole.) Pieces of writing such as "Animal skins" (below) arose from a collection of fur and skins that were on display in the classroom that the children themselves had brought and were able to examine. I need hardly add that there were also in the classroom all kinds of other objects and materials for the children to become acquainted with, play with and use. Another kind of writing which was done during the year arose from what I can only call rather generally "personal concerns." In talking to the young teacher I discovered that he had often tried to recollect his own childhood in the process of making contact with the children. Early in the year they talked about "the things we don't want to bother with," that we leave to other people to do for us, such as going to the barber's to get a haircut.

Animal skins

Fury or presios, prickly, rough, creased, spotty
Fluffy, warm cossy. Itchy. Weak strong tough.
Thin leathers. Dirty streached, yellow red grey old
crinkly, smelly rough, slipry, white green shinny wet
prickly, Holey strippy cold. Thin trasparent.
Thick, usfull.

Christopher

"A Buzzard" arose from looking at a stuffed kestrel that had been borrowed and they talked about birds of prey, about the book and film *Kes*.

A Buzzard First attempt

Circling and weeling swiftly round it hovers on a clearing. Sharply it swoops on to a moth. It rips its papery wings off with its hooked beak. Then half satisfied it chews up the helpless moth.

Second attempt

He wheels swiftly round, then hovers and sharply swoops on to a moth. With his hooked beak he rips off the moths papery wings. Then half satisfied he screams out and chews up his moth.

Christopher

Some children described the appearance of the bird but the talk in the classroom had led other children to imagining the bird in flight.

In the Barber

I push the door open and I dont see the sine saying mink the step. I trip on the step and go flat on my face. I had a soft landing because the floor was coved with hair. The hair smelt like nothing on eath. My mum grabs me by the collar and lifts me up. She said crossly manners boy. The sissors are snipping loudly, and the razor is buzzing. It is hot. But the chair I am waiting in is comfortable. It has nice arms for me to rest on. The hair on the floor is slippery. The barger lets the chair down for me to get on. He lets me listen to his radio and he gives me a sweet. Lovely sticky fudge. Ouch: barber your pulling my hair. Oh by the way dont cut of my sideboards. Rip. I riped the overal you put on me. He said. dont worry ive fineshed. Barber my neck feels cold where you have cut all my hair of. Silly man. Smack i went on my face as triped on the step.

Christopher, 10 years

The class did some work on time. They thought about measuring time and decided that the only way to measure it is to watch things changing. They wrote three pieces "When time seems to stop," "Time passing" and "When time goes slowly." Christopher wrote the following three pieces.

When I would like time to stop

I would like time to stop when I am having a nap on Sunday afternoon. I would be able to be lazy as I often am in school. One disadvantage is that I would get cramp and also I would get pins and needles in my fingers and feet.

That could only happen if the clock stopped. But even if it did mum would soon start it again so it seems prety impossible to ever happen. Unless I disconnected it.

Changes

As time passes apples ripen and go red from when they were green. More time passes by and apples are picked and harvested. Then they are sold or eaten strait away. Sometimes they are put in apple pies. If they are not picked they will fall to the ground and they get broozed or eaten by grubs or creepy things. The same thing hapens with prackticly any fruit if it is not harvested in time. Also fruit can be damaged by the birds at the

time of harvest. So it is best to get your fruit in early. That is if you dont want your fruit eaten for you.

When time seems to stop

Time seems to stop when I am in the bath. Dad say to me, get out of the bath at eight o'clock. I am half asleep just lieing in the hot water. Time seems to stop, but it doesn't. Dad says, Chris are you in bed yet. Its half past eight. Not yet I say. I told you to get out half an our ago. I say, Well sorry. He shouts back, you will have a good hidding tomorrow. I say to myself, I wish time would stop for the odd half hour when I wanted it to. That's just one of the things that cant be done in our large and complicated world.

I have quoted a great deal from one child's work through the year and it could be argued that he is a lively and articulate child who leads an interesting and happy family life and one could not expect anything different from such a child. The sad and terrible truth is that there are many Christophers in our schools who produce safe, competent little pieces, their talents totally unrealized or reduced to mere clerical efficiency. There were other pupils in the class whose work showed even more dramatic progress. I selected Christopher because his work epitomized the response of the class as a whole. This teacher was able to give the children a choice so that they didn't all write in the same way about the same thing: he was able to talk to them in such a way that at all times, and not only on those occasions preparatory to the writing, he led them to introspection and observations of their own.

He brought himself into the classroom and talked to them about his own memories and his own reactions to things. The children appreciated his honesty and responded to it. The personality of the teacher is always present but he was able to tap his own experiences without becoming histrionic. He was not dependent on the children for providing him with an audience. It was a partnership in exploration. The histrionic performance is a very outdated and dying concept of teaching but unfortunately it still exists here and there in one form or another. This teacher was able to turn the children's attention *away* from himself, to lead the children towards insights about themselves and others that would not have been possible for the children to have done alone.

To give some indication of the class as a whole at work here is a cross section of pieces written in response to the reading of a Jon Silkin poem which is reproduced below.

A death to us

A tiny fly fell down on my page
Shivered, lay down, and died on my page
I threw his body on to the floor
That had laid its frail life next to mine.
His death then became an intrusion on
My action, he claimed himself as my victim
His speck of body accused me there
Without an action, of his small brown death
And I think now as I barely perceive him
That his purpose became in dying, a demand
For a murderer of his casual body
So I must carry his death about me
Like a large fly, like a large frail purpose

The Fly

The fly fluttered round my desk landing on my ink bottle it crawls over my pensil, then hears a foot stamp and up it goes. It then flies to my teachers chair. My teacher then just goes to sit down and I know his weight would kill a small insect so I stamp my foot loud and it's so frightened that it flies. His wing's flutter faster than it had ever fluttered before. It then falls to the ground with fright and nobody can help it because if they did it would only try to fly again and then it would be dead. But I got a container and put it in it and leave it to the morning. I looked at it and it was dead. Nobody could save it.

Jane, 10 years

The Death of a Bird

It was one of thouse bright sunny days and I was walking over the common when in front of me I saw a dead bird. There was nothing interesting about that: I had seen plenty of dead birds before. I pushed it away absent-mindedly with my foot. I walked on. Suddenly the bird came back to my mind I ran back to where the ded bird lay. There in front of me was a murder. This bird was different from any other birds I was never quite so sorry in my life. This motionless bird once rode in the sky, but was now dead to this world.

Mary Jane, 10 years

The Ant

It crawled on the ground. It crawled
anywhere as if it were blind
It was like no other creature at all
It looked like a speck of dust blown by the wind

Then it helplessly climbed on to my shoe
and up to my sock, it tickled so I
shook it off without a care
It was dead on the ground
It was a different creature alltogether
It didn't crawl anymore it never would
Then I realized what I had done

Evelyn, 10 years

Harvestman Spider

Its long, bandy legs wobble as he climes
The hill of my leg
I yelp like a dog in pain
A shiver shakes my spine
Still shaking I blindly
Trust forward my hand
For the first solid object
A pencil, I hooked his body
Delicately sized as a drop of water
On to the ground
Even now I shiver as I tread
His life into the soil
It was no longer a shiver of fear
Not a shudder
But a shiver of guilt

Rosemary, 10 years

Ants

As I ran over a field I saw a mountain of dirt. Ants ran across it. I jumped on it, and then I realized what I had done. To us it wold be like an earthquake. Now this ant has no home. I felt like making his house up again. This ant wanders across the cold ground and through the high grass. His friends came, their legs dragged along their eyes look up at me and accuse me of murder and crushing a big house where they live.

Michael, 10 years

The Bluebell

I was in a wood just walking around
When I stepped upon a bluebell
I just walked on and could not care less
Then I stopped agenit a tree
And thought how meen I had been
I turned an ran back
I looked at and picked it up
Instead of its happy face
I saw a bowed head and a rinkled stem

A flower dropped to the green mossy ground then I ran home and stood it in a vase
A few days later and every flower had fallen and nothing was left except the shrudled stalk and the long rivelled leaves

Anne, 10 years

Worm on the Ground

A worm got out of my flower box at once ten minutes later. What did I do to that poor worm he does my flowers good hes back you may stay now and live in my flower box little worm?

Dean, 10 years

A Bird

The are three eggs in a nest. One of the eggs moves. A slight cracking noise is heard, the egg shell breaks. A little beak can be seen. It works itself out blindly. A head can now be seen, it's little beak still peacking away at the shell. Two little wings appear outside the shell. The young bird has now got clear of it's shell. He wanders about the nest, bumping into the other eggs, topperling over now and then, but always picking himself up again.

Karen, 10 years

Ants

The lonely little ant hurrys and scurrys over my desk. He worrys and hurrys away from the edge. Its hard black back looks like a dot on my page. Its helplessness is very great, so when I poke him with my pencil he goes rolly polly unto my ink well. He can't get out so I put my finger down towards him. He crawls quickly and hurridly over my finger on to the desk and away.

Denise, 10 years

"Aw let's sit down on the grass." "Hey get up, hury, it is a beetle, tread onit." "Ah I've trod on it." Just as he moved his leg I thought that was a life. It never did anything to me. I turned in the right way up. It's shell was crushed. I picked it up and put it in a matchbox and took it home. I dug a hole in the garden, I took one last look and then I put it in the hole and covered it.

Liam, 9 years

A Bee

"Look mum," why?. "A bee is climbing up your dress."
"Ooh get it off me" "hit it kill it"
"But why?" "he's innocent." "Hardly, "Oh get it off,"
"I do wish there wern't any." "Shoo you pest.
Its on the rosadendriam's now. Good.
The bee sucked up the nectar from the flowers and took
it to the hive
"Have your sandwiches now" "there your favorite, honey."
"That reminds me" "Bees make honey."
I am glad they live to make honey for my sandwiches

Christopher, 10 years

The Ant

I live in the desert
I am a beetle
I live underground
I have a budos on the front of me
I live underground to protect me
from other animals
One day, I went to get some food
I saw a fid and I went wy and killed them
for my dinner, then I remembered that
I should not have done it. so I started
To dig a hole, in the ground to put them in
for a grave. I never kill again.

Kevin, 10 years

The eleven pieces, apart from their intrinsic interest, show beyond doubt how the children are used to interpreting things in their own way. The Silkin poem has taken them in very different directions.

In this class and in others like it there were children, who would be usually classed as of low ability, who were being talked to and read to in a very challenging and ambitious fashion. The children were moreover responding and were producing work of a very high standard mainly because it was assumed that they would participate and had something to offer. Where at least 50 percent of the children in a class seem confident and articulate in talking, reading and writing and are able to fulfill the school's demands, the teachers stay in a good state of morale. They receive reassurance from the children themselves that what they are doing is benefiting the class and must be on the right lines. If however the number of children who are able to cope with school subjects drops, then poems, stories, the kind of talk and the kind of writing all become far less demanding. It is unlikely that children like Dean or Kevin or Denise or even Anne, if in a class with many others like them, would even have

been presented with a poem like "A death to us" much less expected to interpret it for themselves. The general standard of the class was raised not just by the interaction of the children but also by the teacher's assumption that all the children irrespective of ability would be given the same kind of material and expected to respond to it in their own way.

I have, of course, not described fully all the work which went on throughout the year nor would it be possible, but some of it is well worth touching upon. For example, there was some talk about animals and pets early in the year and some of the children made an individual book about their own pets.

Later, an interesting piece of work was done on Africa (see p. 45).

In such circumstances where the children had been encouraged to talk and write expressing their own ideas and experiences, it is not surprising that by the end of the year a topic like "Nobody knows" was suggested to them and two children wrote about it in this way.

Nobody Knows

Nobody knows what happens when you die
Nobody knows the saddness
Of a silent sigh
Nobody can see a thing, invisible to us,
Nobody can count the stalks
Of straw, thats in a truss
There's many, many million things
That man just cannot tell
And I don't know what you think
But I think its just as well.

Rosemary, 10 years

Nobody knows that I have
a secret camp only I do
nobody knows that I got
a look out only I do.
Only I do
Ow. I've told you
arnt I silly
nobody knows only I do.
nobody knows what I do.

Liam, 9 years

When I asked the teacher what kind of talk had preceded this work, he said there hadn't been very much. He had suggested the topic "Nobody knows" and the children had

written about it. By that stage the children had become used to listening to themselves and their own reactions, and all had gained in confidence in writing and the ability to put their own thoughts on paper.

Why did this young teacher's work seem so significant? Reading the work, one is struck immediately by the range and variety of it and by the way in which the children make choices for themselves. But both these impressive qualities arise because of the range and variety of experience being offered to them. They have turned their language upon everything as a means of observing not only themselves but also the world around them.

The two teachers whose work we have been looking at have been able to help children reveal meanings in their own lives. Too often these are overlooked by the children themselves who would not think them relevant or acceptable or important enough.

It is, however, very complicated to teach as these teachers do, which is a way of helping children to individualize their own concerns, to help them to see aspects of their own experience and to reveal different facets of their experience. It is always much easier to explain to others that you have been doing something about spelling or punctuation than to say, "I'm helping children find meanings for themselves."

My impression was that in fact these two teachers held a very nice balance between helping children to write more accurately, to care about the way they were writing and yet not block the children's flow of ideas. It is generally easier for the teacher to intervene on the more obvious and immediate items of written work than it is to see development in children's writing over a long period of time.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF WRITING

By now I have, I hope, made clear that I am very conscious that when we attend to the written language we hear many different voices ranging from the voice of poetry to those voices which are clearly intent on teaching us, informing us and persuading us. We are ambitious that our pupils should learn how to attune their ears and voices to these different modes. And yet the road from the kind of writing which is still relatively innocent of such niceties of distinction to the carefully adjusted manner is a difficult one, or at least far from direct. Between five and eleven when the process is only just beginning it is especially difficult. The temptations are alluring, for here there seems to be the promise of "structure" and "sequence." The price of succumbing to

the temptation is usually a premature restriction on the choices open to children.

I saw classrooms in which there were two kinds of writing, "creative" and "informative," and children were set to undertake one or the other. Often in either mode they were presented with assignments which were not all that different from the old conventional exercise in the textbook. Behind these endeavors there seemed to be an anxiety that the children should conform to what was in the teacher's mind. Their writing did not spring from the need to communicate in that kind of way, but rather from the need to meet the demands of an exercise the purpose of which must often remain obscure. I heard a pupil ask when work of this kind was afoot, "Do we do it in our creative books, Miss?" The clearly defined task proposed by the teacher may serve as a prop to some children and even as a challenge to a few, but when children are not hemmed in by the task they show considerable ingenuity and variety.

Anxiety in teaching often expresses itself in hurry ("acceleration!") and the need to press on--to the next bit of syllabus, or the next developmental stage or to what "they'll need in the secondary school." In writing this becomes learning how to write informatively or learning how to imitate literary forms. Yet less differentiated writing has within it the seeds of all these other modes and in the personal expressive writing of children there is immense variety. The embryonic kinds of writing are often more successful because there is no need to sustain them longer than the genuine impulse lasts.

We need now to pursue this process at work. A good example with which to begin is a child's self-composed information book because this is a well-known enough kind of product, found in numerous primary schools. Quite often we are told that it is the result of "research" in accordance with the current tendency to lend status to children's activities by finding suitably prestigious adult names for them. They are often the result of industrious ransacking of encyclopedias or what are called information books. Often the child's work consists of no more than copying pieces which take his fancy. The book, reproduced completely below, was the outcome of a very different approach. The theme, too, is worth noting--"Africa"--because like so many topics it asks children to understand a world which is beyond the reach of their personal experience (the abiding problem of much history and geography teaching).

In this school a superb display of African objects was mounted in the entrance hall. There were musical instruments, pottery, lengths of woven material and samples of tie-dying. Collections of books were assembled in the classrooms. A teacher showed color slides of his own

visit, read them African folk tales and played records of African music. While the exhibition was on display for the whole school, all the children saw and handled the exhibits and there were always children looking, drawing and talking.

Booklet A guide to Africa

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Cheifs

If you are a Cheif, you are given a length of bamboo, the longer it is, the more important a cheif you will be. The bamboo is the hieght that you are alowed to build your house Cheifs have masks to dance with, also they have many whisks, they are wiry handled with horse hairs in them.

A whisk (picture)

Cheifs have houses with three entrances. One entrance, the important men go in, another, ordinary men go in and, round at the back, the women go in.
Cheifs have houses that they call palaces, but we would not call them that.
The more important the cheif is, the taller and more grand, more like a palace, their house is.

Houses

The typical African house is round, like, the one on the cover. Every year they thatch it again, the Africans are getting tired of continually thatching their houses, every time a drip came through the roof. So, they decided that they would have tin roofs, now they couldent get round tin roofs, so they started to make rectangular houses.
Smoke cannot get out of tin roofs, so they had to make roof-holes, but rain would, could, and was coming in, so they made chimneys. But dozens of Africans still have thatched roofs.

Compounds

A compound is a settling miles from anywhere. Where a man and his several wives, sones and daughters, live. A boy called John Fobellah, has a fther who is a cheif. He is the son of Bellah, but he is not the most important cheif. And John walks for four hours, to get to a town.

Art

African Art is very different from British Art.
(Picture of sculpture)
This is an African instrument. You play it by putting your hands inside the holes and pressing the keys, as they flick back, they make a donging sound.

Lefems

Cheifs hold Lefem meetings in bushes. Only the Cheif, and men who have lost their fathers, are allowed to go. Outside they stick a beautifully carved Lefem stick. On top are two head, below, three antelopes, and below that two lizards. These are carved on because they believe that the cheifs turn into antelopes or lizards. They roast a goat, the cheif has the liver, and the next important, the kidneys, and so on.

The Boa Constricktor

The most deadly snake, it is the boa constricktor when it catches you, it winds round you, and strangles you. Boa constrictors are enormous and deadly. Perhaps you don't know one is slithering off a rock, until you get strangled. They are enormous and beautifully colored, baby ones are about ten feet long.

Slave trading

Slave trading is cruel. Can you imagine being in a cage, with tied arms, having people staring at you.
It is like being at a cattle market. People might put notices on trees, that say something like this:
Thirty seasoned Negroes. To be sold for credit at private sale. Amongst which is a carpenter, none of whom are known to be dishonest Also, to be sold for cash, a regular bred young negro man cook, born in this country, who served several years under an exceedingly good French cook abroad, and his wife, a middle-aged washer woman (both very hones) and their two children. Likewise, a young man, a carpenter. For terms, apply to the printer.

Tradition

To African men, a lovely thought
Wood be, to have as many wives
As could possibly be bought.
To have just one they always feel
Would give them many a reason to
Be lonely at a meal.
Besides tradition being this
It must not broken be
Or everything would be amiss.

How we got the moon (from an African folk tale)

One day Elephant was rushing along and he bumped into Giraffe. The Giraffe said, "What is the matter, Elephant?" "There is a Giant in the forest, who is pulling up all of the trees," answered Elephant. Giraffe rushed along with the Elephant and when they reached the forest, Giraffe said, "Why that's a flood, it washes the trees over." "Oh look," said Elephant, "It's moving back." "Now look" answered Giraffe, "all the trees cluttered everywhere." "Lets burn them," suggested Elephant. "What a super idea" answered Giraffe.
So they dragged all the trees into a pile. And set it on fire. Next say when they came, it was a ball of hard ash.
"Now what do we do?" Asked Giraffe. "Let's make a catapult, and fly it into the air," suggested Elephant. "Yes we shall" said Giraffe. So they collected creepers and tied them in a loop round two posts. Then they rolled the ball into the loop and pulled right back and let go. It soared into the air, so high that it did not come down. And they called it "moon."

Rosemary, 10 years

The exhibition and all that accompanied it provided firsthand mediation for that remote world of Africa and, from the rich material presented through a variety of media, Rosemary was able to make her own selection and write it up for her "Guide to Africa."

Not all the children in her class composed such booklets, it was a matter of choice. Suppose now that the whole process had begun in a different way and the teacher of the class had decided that guidebook language was a good model to work towards, and that the children were set the task of writing a guidebook to some remote country of their choosing, would Rosemary's book have been the same? I doubt it.

Much more important, even teasing, is that Rosemary is not really writing a guidebook anyway, because firstly she does not understand the very special demands of such

books and, secondly, she probably has not the least intention of guiding anybody. She is playing at writing a guidebook. It is a good game for it gives her a license to dwell on whatever takes her fancy. But she tries to play according to the rules and one hears occasionally the note of the guidebook ("The typical African house is round").

At some time or another in the secondary school some pupils learn to write within the tight conventions of scientific prose; possibly the able ones catch it from textbooks and a few explicit do's and don'ts. A primary teacher should not be hypnotized by this very specialized language which is mastered by so few but rather notice what primary school children can do writing their own observations. Here are some Oxfordshire children writing about snails.

Snails

When the snail comes out of its shell and climbs up the side of the jam jar you can see the muscles ripple. First of all as the snail moves it leaves it shell behind near its tail then it pulls it to the head. When the snail is a baby it has not got a shell. How they grow their shell is that when the skin dries up it makes the shell. If the shell cracks it grows another one. The skin is cold and rough. When you touch their eyes they go in and come out again. Sometimes if you look carefully you can see them eat they eat all kinds of leaves. At night when the snail goes out he makes a silver trail and it comes back on its own silver trail. If it follows another snails trail it would get lost.

Clifford, 8 years

When we watch the snail eating the flour we saw its mouth going up and down. He has four teeth like a cheese grater. He likes eating grass and nettle leaves.

Andrew, 7 years

The snail moves slowly. Indeed it takes an hour to go a foot. It would take tow hours to go two feet. The snail has lots of colors and the colors slide into each other. The snail leaves a slippy slimey trail behind it. The snail puts its feelers on the ground. As they touch the ground they go in.

Sean, 7 years

The snail has tow eyes, but not like ours. The eye is like a stick with a black dot in it. The snail has a smaller tongue and slowly the tongue is pushed out. The

snail has two antlers to feel its way and taste its food, but they are smaller and the eyes are bigger and when you touch the antler it goes in the snail is a slow creature and as it moves you can see its muscles and you would never think how hard it is to go such a little way. The snail is like a slug but the slug has never had a shell.

Mandy, 8 years

The mass of colours on its shell make it colourful
A black scaly body pushes along earnestly
eyes swaying from side to side looking for danger
A little rattle in the bushes sends a warning of
danger in the snails mind.
Quickly the snail goes into its shell until the danger
goes

Martin, 8 years

A slimy creature is the snail. He roams around as slowly as a slug. He never seems to go anywhere because he would be too slow to get there. He feels his way with his pointed feelers and if you look closely you will see that one feeler is longer than the other.

Martin, 8 years

(Diagram)
To make a small spiral you need:
String
Chalk and a small flower pot. We used a small flower pot because we drew it on the desk. We tied the chalk to some string to the flower pot and drew the spiral like this.

Sandra and me Deborah, 10/11 years

The snail gently uncoils his body from his spiral shell. From his flat face come two pairs of antlers. He pushes his face forward and leaves his shell behind. Then he drags his shell forward and begins again. As he moves his shell forward and begins again. As he moves his long antlers tremble and he stretches out his short pair to touch the groung and then he pulls them back as if from some nettles.

Mandy, 8 years

A quick inspection of these pieces shows that these children are looking for themselves. There is no easy way out for them, recourse to the stereo-typed, and

often barren, language of a textbook. Not all scientific language arises from observation, but most school work starts with a foundation of observed phenomena and all experiments call for careful observation. So often book-based observation leads to children seeing what they were told they would see and duly recording their "observations" in the approved language. Fortunately there have been great changes in secondary school science which run counter to that procedure. The snail-observers are being given good preparation for the new kind of work.

These careful attempts to look closely at a live creature all share one feature; the language shows that the observer takes himself to be part of the observing procedure. Martin quite directly tells us what is going on in the snail's mind ("A little rattle in the bushes sends a warning of danger in the snail's mind). The other children use words which show beyond doubt that in order to look at the snails they have in some sense *to be* the snail and feel with it.

> ". . . you would never think how hard it is to go such a little way."

> ". . . he drags his shell forward."

or they interpret what they see.

> "He never seems to go anywhere."

Inevitably much of the observation which goes on arises from expeditions and simple field-work which is, so to speak, less self-contained than watching the live specimen in the classroom. Take, for instance, this collection of writing from a class of children who had been taken pond-dipping; they were nine to eleven year olds.

On the wall of their classroom were examples of writing, drawing, painting. Some specimens were in aquaria in the room alongside a table with microscope, magnifying glass and relevant reference books. Some children had continued the work on their own and had made pond-dipping folders from which the following pieces of writing were taken.

When approaching the water you have to be very
quiet because it vibrates to the water the
shadow must not be in front of you because
your shadow frighten the fish the fish would
dart away and go to place where people do not
go under a stone.

Joy, 11 years

A water scater skims across the water
without getting its feet wet.

Joy

Water Beetle

She glides along
She stays in the stones
She feeds on cyclops
She waits till the cyclops
Come to the bottom
She riggles and hydes that all she does
Wriggles and hides, riggles and hides.
She glides along lazy and tired
And then wakes up
So lively

Joy, 11 years

Ponds and Pond Life

A pond is probably to most people dirty sludgy mess. But have you ever visited a pond, well really visited a pond. You will honestly be surprised at the number of different insects and creatures you see. Some people are afraid of these insects, but really they are quite harmless. This is one of the great advantages of an English pond. You don't find crocodiles swimming about when you're fishing. Heare's a simple way to make a net.

(1) Take an old stocking and cut the middle out. Tie one end and wire the other. Fix to a stick. A simple fishing rod. Now no excuse not to go pond dipping. Ready to move off? Okay, a net and a jar. No not shoes. Wellingtons. That's better. You've got the pond in front of you. What are you going to do? Fish. No. Fill your jar. Yes. Even in filling your jar you get some samples of pond life. Got your samples. Back home for tea. Going next week. I'll call for you.

Elaine, 10 years

When we remember that no special instructions about how they were to write were given to the children, the variety is impressive in these few pieces, and the endeavor even more impressive. Joy's first piece shows her attempting to say something which is difficult for her, but she is not scared of the attempt. As with the guide book these words are probably not genuine instructions to "you" but much more, or at least as much, the child's attempt to get it right for herself. But

she is moving towards the language with which we express such things. Elaine's net "recipe", though much in the convention, has the gossipy tone of someone enjoying the process of instruction rather than of someone who hopes her instructions will be followed. Her abrupt transition from ponds to net-making shows her to be following her own fancy rather than an organization set up to be of practical use. In Joy's poem the essence of the water beetle's life as she sees it is focused on its gliding, wriggling and hiding, words she selects and repeats.

These children have not been pared down to the bare bones of expository prose and, once launched, make their first tentative efforts to try out for fit particular voices. The great shifts of focus present in the varieties of adult writing are for them only minor adjustments and small experiments, and the trying out of voices which belong with roles which can scarcely yet be theirs.

But there are roles which are unquestionably theirs, amongst them the roles of observer, investigator, experimenter. In giving close attention to "language", in feeling concern that children should develop their powers of using language it is all too easy to forget to ask ourselves what we want them to have it for. I may well have been guilty on several occasions in this text of enthusiastically directing attention to this linguistic advance or that in such a way that I seemed to be saying that progress in language is self-justifying, that it's a precious possession in its own right, and like a new car it will impress the neighbors. We saw how children when actively engaged in observing-with-doing used the spoken language as an intrinsic part of the process. We must now face up to a more puzzling problem. When children are studying the world around them, engaging with it, nosing into things, prodding the physical world, taking note of what goes on, what is the point of writing down their responses, of reporting what has happened, of suggesting in writing possible explanations and causes? There may, of course, be a lot less point than we think. We are so utterly indoctrinated to believe that no true learning has taken place unless it is written up or written out that no one has seriously examined what kinds of important learning in any field might take place without a word having been written. So it is well worthwhile looking at several sets of written work which arose from the activity of pupils and which are really separated from the events of which they speak. They are not, in other words, notes jotted down as reminders, nor records kept for later consultation and study. The practical values of such uses of the written language can scarcely be questioned.

First we shall look at some children from Darlington engaged in studying birds and selecting a particular aspect for their own contribution. Duncan and Mark are trying to find out whether there is any relationship between the number of birds they count and weather conditions. These are some extracts from what they wrote at the end of their work.

Counting birds

I think more birds come in the fog. Paul thinks that in the fog when there were a lot of seagulls perhaps they might have come inland to escape the thicker fog at sea.

Geoffrey said that he thought that it is because of the wind. In foggy weather there is no wind and that it was probably windier at the coast. Duncan said that there is a saying that if there are a lot of seagulls inland it means they have stoms at sea and bad weather is coming.

Duncan, 11 years

Conclusion

When it was foggy and wet there was the lowest number of birds which was five. Geoffrey thinks that the birds didn't come because their food might have been stuck in the mud and they could have got stuck in the mud. The highest amount of birds we have seen was 124 which was in the fog. The fog gives them a cover from any passers by. No one can see them in the fog. Everytime its been under five it has been muddy and wet. I think the birds prefer dry weather because their food is not always dry when it is raining.

When it has rained the bigger birds go to the middle of the field and the smaller birds to the outskirts.

Mark, 10 years

There is undeniably a practical purpose in this writing. It is a contribution to a joint endeavor and the separate investigations are pooled for everyone's inspection, questioning and enjoyment and, writing being durable, the children can turn to each other's work at different times and for different purposes. This is no trivial matter for it is a far cry from treating writing as a private investment in the mark market in a deal with a teacher-valuer. But is this all there is to it?

The children looking at their laburnum specimen and talking about it make an interesting comparison. The fact that they are talking enables them to speculate freely and help each other's speculations. They are concerned with what *might* happen (if, for example, a seed fell from a tree) but these children have watched it happen or made it happen, and what is more they are looking back at a sustained activity over a considerable period of time, almost a term. That takes some putting together and in writing they can do just this. It is not so much that separate sentences could not have found their way into speech, but rather that the sustained linking together is not possible or at any rate highly unlikely. Duncan and Mark are significantly reporting not only on their findings but also on the discussions they had had to try to reach an explanation of them (Paul thinks. . ., Duncan said. . ., etc.). Only the leisurely retrospective act of writing gives the boys a chance to sift their talk and their experience in order to accumulate their total concluding statement. They would need to want to make a concluding statement, to care enough about it, to take advantage of this feature of the written word. All the same, in a piece of writing like this, the boys are probably making only very small gains over the spoken word though they are perhaps beginning to feel its potentiality.

But we can go a stage further if we look at another group of eleven-year-old children from a Yorkshire school who have been on a week's field trip to a marine study center at Boggle Hole. We can see at once on reading these pieces that they did not arise from the yearly outing or special treat or from something to do at the end of the summer term. The children bring to their field study attitudes which have been built up in everything they do. So from the writing we can not only catch the taste of the original experience but also appreciate that the act of writing has a similar taste. Here is a selection of the pieces.

Boggle Hole

We looked under some rocks but found nothing. Then we went in a bigger rock pool. I asked Keith to help me lift a big rock when we lifted the rock up we saw three shore crabs. When the tide goes out the shore crabs hide under rocks and among the seaweed. This crab that Keith and me got was wild. We had to get at the side of its shell. Its colour was green it feeds and catches its food with its large pincers. These crabs walk sideways. The shore crab is a scavanger. it feed on dead or alive things and rubbish off the seashore.

Paul, 11 years

In this particular rockpool that I looked in was so crammed with all kinds of marine life, like the lonely hermit crab changing houses when it finds a better shell to live in. The limpet, mussels and dog whelks squeezed together as if it was some sort of a grand procession at a fun fair. The corners of this enchanted pool were so dark I could not see what was in them. In that same pool for some minutes it was so still until Mr. H. lifted a rock up and a fish darted out and broke the thin skin of the water and sent all the other creatures tossing and turning I chased after it, it escaped into a very small cavern in the side of an enormous rock. I got the hammer and started to break into the rock as if I was smashing open a hard nut shell. After a while the water turned gray and I could not see what I was doing. A few minutes later the hole was finished and it was big enough to get my hand in the fish shot out again but it did not get very far because it got stuck in shallow water. I picked it up I gave it to one of the girls who was carrying a bucket.

Russell, 11 years

The Shrimp

I carefully placed my foot on a rock which surrounded a rock pool. I saw a shrimp dart from under a small stone, so I slowly placed my net into the water trying not to disturb the sand, but it was no good. The transparent body of the shrimp was too quick for me. It was trying to make a furrow with its hind limbs. Its long feelers started to move I think the shrimp felt danger. A few feet away there was a large piece of seaweed I went for it with my hand, the shrimp darted into the seaweed so I started to look for it, but it was no good I'd lost it.

(name not recorded)

Starfish

We walked along the beach intill we came to a rock pool we stopped and I lifted a rock up and saw three starfish but I did not pick them up because I thought they would sting so I picked them up and they did not sting. Its skin is very rough and the color is orange-brown. The skin has got like pimples on. The starfish feeds on mussels, oister winkles. The starfish catches its food by crawling over its food and squeezing its prey and eating the insides out. We found another kind of starfish that's thinner than the common starfish. It has got little thin hairs and moves much quicker.

Paul, 11 years

The Hermit Crab

I walked along the rocky beach. I lifted a large rock and a little shrimp wriggled with its seven legs. Soon I found a hermit crab. A hermit is just like an ordinary crab, but it lives in a shell. A hermit crab has got three legs and two pincers. You can find hermit crabs in rock pools. The hermit crab is a carnivorous animal. Its colour is a pinky red. The hermit crab feeds on winkles, whelks and sea creatures. If you touch its shell it goes in its shell like a shot when the hermit crab is out of its shell it walks sidewoulds, but when it is in its shell it walks straight.

Geoffrey, 11 years

Here is vitality, energy and excitement. Every one of these boys is not only bent on investigation but has found the seashore a place to make things happen. Each one has contrived an adventure for himself, an adventure worth the telling, worth making something of afterwards. It is quite impossible to disentangle the tale and the drama from the scientific pursuit. They give zest to each other. The shore crab is duly noted as a scavenger, but it was also "wild"; Russell "chases" his fish and his frenzied smashing of the rock seems more important than the fish he parts with so lightly; another child observes the transparent body of the shrimp, the behavior of its hind limbs and its feelers but all in the process of trying to catch it. Paul's second piece confines itself more to observation but the eating habits of the starfish are made into a little horror story.

What I am suggesting is that when children of this age are not only concerned with the world out there but also their felt responses, then writing can in the first place seem worthwhile to them and in the second place serve a continuing function for them. The exciting experience of crabs, of shrimps and fish in rock pools becomes the exciting experience of writing about it; but it becomes a different experience in the process. For writing permits them at one and the same time to record their observations and their "results" ("If you touch it, it goes in its shell"), and also to work out in the very process of expressing themselves the uniqueness of the event. The features of crabs and shrimps each child shares with others but his story of how he found out is his own. It is only in the careful telling that it can be elaborated into this unique event. The re-excitement made possible by the fully-formulated expression of the experience raises the value of it, makes it a more durable possession and in the end makes returning to such experience and such explor-

atory encounters with the world seem the more inviting. We are not after all concerned to organize a scientist's apprenticeship of years and years duration but rather this attack on life which takes in not only the beginnings of a scientific approach but also has the personal and social qualities present in and fostered by these pieces of writing.

Here is a final reminder of the ease with which primary school children swing from objective observation to the poetic view. To them there is no separation and indeed for their purposes there is rarely any need to separate the two.

Larch Buds in Spring

The larch has needle like spikes on each twig
Its buds are alternate and there are 27 needles on each bud
In the morning there is a dew drip in the middle of each bud
The needles on the larch tree look a hedgehog back
The larch has bobbley twigs like a stick incest
The needles look like a fan
When you put your hand on top of the needles
It tikels like a feather.

Susan, 9 years

"27 needles on each bud". That's what we would all have said (if she's got it right!) but "bobbley twigs like a stick incest"--that is absolutely her own (including the spelling!).

I have made some attempt to see why children might want to write down what they have done and felt and talked about, what are characteristic ways in which they do it and what value this activity might have for them. We need now to push the inquiry a little further.

THE QUESTION OF AUDIENCE

The kind of writing we have been looking at has been in some sense for the writer himself but that is only part of the story. It is also directed at someone else. Who? To what extent is the writing influenced by its status as an act of communication? We must talk to one another to live together, to act together. Does writing share these functions? To look at these questions we will stay with informative writing because superficially it would seem to be most obviously an act of communication and because those to whom the communication is directed must clearly affect what is written.

The boys came back from Boggle Hole with their adventures and discoveries. But field trips do not occur every day, whereas many of the classrooms I saw were alive with children making things, examining things, carrying out experiments of different kinds, trying to work out the significance of what they had been doing. There was Susan, aged 6, measuring foxgloves:

One of the fox gloves was ten for my hand spans tall
it was taller than me and the other one in nine of
my hand spans tall and it was taller than me too
The other one and the middle one are the same size.

Nicholas, aged 7, who had been cooking and following a recipe:

Scones (Recipe first written out)

Mix all dry ingredients add egg then mix stirring with knife. Roll on floured board. Cut out brush tops with milk cook in over for 10-15 minutes.

When I was rubbin in the flour fell through my hands like snow. They were quite easey to make. I did not put any currents in mine. They rose quite a bit and they tasted nice.

Humphrey, aged 7, who is interested in time, has examined a sundial and made a timer of his own:

A Sundial

I thought it would work in the night because sometimes the moon is very bright so it could make a shadow. Mrs. Nethacott brought one to school. The electric all most makes it go.

I made my timer with a flat piece of wood for the bottom of it and then I had to cut some wood about a foot long and then I asked Mr. Lear for the nails and then I hammered the pieces of wood together and painted then let it dry and then I took it to Mr. Lear and he drilled four holes through then I could wire the bottle on. Then Mrs. Nethacott and I had a lot of trouble making it work. I had to put plasticine in the top and make a hole with a pin. When I was having my dinner it dripped $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches in 1 hour it dropped $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

These little compositions are fascinating reminders of the varied world presented to children inside primary classrooms and give us an inkling of what they make of it all. But to whom are these words addressed? The two obvious possibilities are the teacher and fellow-pupils.

But when we examine the texts it soon becomes clear that these writings are not modified in any important way to satisfy the requirements of either of these groups. For this is exactly why the question of audience is important. When once the writer becomes aware that he must take active steps to accommodate the reader his writing will change in certain important respects. Our six and seven year olds behave very much as they do when talking. They assume the teacher will be interested in their doings which have already been accorded the prestige of the classroom. Indeed Humphrey talks about Mrs. Nethacott (his teacher). What are we to make of that? I am inclined to believe that at times these young children talk to themselves on the page. Nicholas moving away from the impersonal directive language of the recipe goes over the experience very much for himself.

We would expect that as children grow older their sense of audience would develop and that we would be able to detect in their work clear signs that someone else is involved in their writing--namely the reader. This is worth dwelling on for it brings out in a striking way one of the greatest differences between writing and talking and, moreover, should lead us to ask whether teaching of a particular kind could help children make the transition from talking to writing with the least difficulty. When children first learn to speak they soon use language to make things happen, very important things like getting their mothers to do things. As their grasp on language grows and at the same time their interaction with the world becomes more complex, they try to make their language do much more ambitious things. How can they tell it is working, that they are being understood? Partly through the actions of others, the desired result, but also because others use language back at them, they ask questions, add something of their own and so on. Meanwhile they are using the expressiveness of the human face, of gesture and of bodily posture. We all know how skilled the young child becomes at searching faces and how quickly he detects the difference between the words uttered and the intent. As soon as the child starts writing, however, this rich source of information about the success or failure of what he is trying to say is withdrawn. No one is listening. Eventually what we have to do is to be the reader as well as the writer, to have him in mind. This is just what we have to do when thinking when we talk to ourselves as though we are talking to someone else. All this suggests that the young child needs a reader whose function will be as much the same as someone he talks to; the teacher must be the audience. Later on his classmates can become the vocal readers when their reading is up to it and their social development motivates them. Ultimately the reader inhabits the internal world of the writer, though writers are likely always to welcome the

other kind. Children come to accept the teacher-reader and, if they are lucky, find the best audience they have. Nevertheless, the best possible teacher is a very limited audience and cannot on her own represent the adjustments which different audiences demand from us. That's just the trouble; for as children proceed up the primary school it is fatally easy for the teacher, the reader who has much more power over the writer than ordinary ones, to propose tasks for other audiences in other situations when the child knows all the time that the reader has not changed. More usually the situation will be worse than that for certain kinds of writing will be proposed as though they exist in some absolute form independent of any audience. The teacher then becomes a special kind of reader, the one who sees whether you have got it right, whether you can do it.

I have put all that in very general terms. We can examine some of these issues in the light of some pieces by older children.

Spring Balance

The aim of my project is to weigh objects on a spring. I found by experimenting that the spring stretchs five and a half inches when you put a pound in the bucket. Then by splitting up the five and a half in half I got half a pound. I split that up and kept splitting the pieces up till I had sixteen pieces I marked off the ounces and made another card until it weighed five pound. This spring balance will weigh objects accurately if you use a rule and look at it from the side.

Andrew, 11 years

When the cube was one inch long the volume was one cubic inch and the surface area was six square inches so the surface area was six times as big as the volume. When the cube was two inches long the volume was eight cubic inches and the surface area was twenty-four square inches then the surface area was three times as big. When the cube was three inches long the volume was twenty-seven cubic inches and the surface area was fifty-four square inches so this time the surface area was only twice as big as the volume. When the cube was six inches long the volume was 216 square inches so this time the surface area and the volume were the same. And when the cube was seven inches long the volume was 343 cubic inches and the surface area was 294 inches so now the surface area is smaller then the volume. So in the small cube the surface area was much bigger compared with its volume than when the cube was bigger. So a mouse will have a bigger surface area compared with its volume or size than an elephant.

Heat is lost through the skin which is the surface area so a mouse will lose more than an elephant compared with its size so it needs to eat more for its size than an elephant for its size.

Melville, 11 years

Andrew has some notion of an audience other than a teacher; he writes *as though* others might want to know what he has been up to. Perhaps the activity on which he has been engaged has prompted this aspiration. He is conscious of the fact that he has been "experimenting." So he can state his aim, proceed methodically through the steps he has taken and finally make a very lucid appraisal of the instrument he has been developing. But he cannot quite manage it all and he does not bear in mind that he has not told us about the bucket and what he is using as a weight. We are left to puzzle out what the pieces were. His project is reported impersonally but he does not feel under any pressure to abandon "I" and "you," a change which later on may be foisted on him quite unnecessarily. Melville seems to be addressing his teacher. He assumes in his opening sentence that his reader knows about the cubes and that he has been doing some work on them so he can plunge right in. The writing reports what he has found out. Thus he writes "when *the* cube *was* 1 in. long, etc." and not "when *a* cube *is* etc. . . ." But he does not address the teacher as an individual with particular interests and the teacher is very much a representative figure, for the whole account is made perfectly clear for a general reader including the very difficult concept of the comparative size of surface area.

In both of these accounts the boys know what they are doing and are masters of their material. They are able to modify their writing in a way which is *appropriate*, or very nearly so, to informing an unknown audience. Though their audience is certainly the teacher the way they talk it through to themselves is probably not with the teacher in mind. In one sense this writing is genuinely informative for it says to the reader, "This is what *I* did", and is quite different from compositions, "essays" if you will, in which every item is borrowed from the book or the teacher to be handed back to a teacher who knows it all in the first place. Writing like that cannot be genuinely informative whatever other virtues may be claimed for it. However, the mere fact that a child is reporting on his own activity is no guarantee that something of the same kind will not occur.

Copper Sulfate

Copper sulphate is formed by electricity running from the cathode which is the terminal and runs down into the water at which it attacks the anode which is the postive terminal. If the wire inside the insulators were copper copper sulfate would be formed. This is a chemical reaction. We got some apparatus which was most usefull for this experiment we then supplied six volts into the water. When we came back after a long period of time a blue substance was lying at the bottom of the test tube. According to me (Victor) and Alastair it is copper sulphate.

Victor, 11 years

Though no doubt Victor was very proud of the apparently scientific carry-on he is involved in and just as proud of the lingo he has fastened on to which matches the laboratory gear he has rigged up, the trouble is that he doesn't seem to have any clear idea of what he is doing and why he is doing it. It is of course possible that the impressive terminology is better understood by him than he can convey but the delightfully innocent or possibly wry comment of the last sentence makes that unlikely. The two boys have no reason for thinking their blue substance is copper sulfate except that they have been told it is. They have performed a magic rite and have learned the incantation to go with it--copper sulphate, cathode, anode, positive terminal, insulators, chemical reaction, apparatus and test tube. Perhaps this is rather hard on Victor and only *a talk* with him would tell, but if he continues down this path he will join many others who believe they have explained something by conjuring up words and phrases which pin labels on phenomena instead of questioning, observing and trying to formulate things for themselves. Victor and Alastair found this experiment in a book and had the initiative to carry it out and write it up for the teacher. But it was destined to come to its predetermined end and did not belong to anything else they were doing. The teacher has the choice between unqualified delight at the display of grown-up language or, in his role of special reader, asking questions like, "Why is it a chemical reaction?" Some would say the teacher should find better things for such lively boys to do. I would not like this point to be misunderstood. I see nothing wrong with the delight in handling new and even esoteric language or for that matter, getting it wrong to start with; nor do I disapprove of Victor wanting to impress his teacher audience with how much he has learned. I am questioning whether the "experiment" he has carried out has led to genuinely experimental use of language.

The more we examine the writing of children in the primary school the clearer it becomes that they do not write out of a powerful sense of a particular audience with particular needs and, unless the teacher is making special demands, she is no more than an added incentive for something which they say for the satisfaction of the saying. We have seen this to be true even of those pieces which seem to be very much audience-directed. It becomes more true when children turn over a problem or begin to suggest their own ideas about what they have been learning. Both of the following compositions by Rosemary, aged ten, arose out of school work:

Nought

0 is not a number. The obvious proof of this is
John had two sweets
Mary had none
John told Mary to eat some sweets
But she had none--
So she could not eat any number of sweets;
You cannot eat a number of sweets, if you have none.
When you are nought, you are not born.
Nothing and nothing make nothing. The obvious proof of this is
John and Mary wanted to collect sweets
John bought none, Mary bought none, so they had none.
I think:
Nought has no permanent place in the number line. As it belongs
with digit 1 in ten, 2 in twenty, etc.
You can multiply nought by any number, and it will remain the same
old 'NOUGHT' Multiply by 9068510819247386015
And you still have 0'
Because in things nought has no form, in a way.

People

There are two sexes
Male and female
Men go to work, to earn money to keep the family
Women usualy stay at home in the house
They clean the house
Some people are pretty and some are ugly
Some people can sing well and some cannot
Some people work hard and some are lazy
The differents between humans and animals is that
Humans have brains that can reason
Because we grow up so slowly we have time to learn a lot
Humans can reason, that is, they understand each other and can judge
We are 'Naked apes' and we walked erect from Neanderthal times

Before those times were Cromagnon times
Cromagnons were obviously apes
'Peking man' was the first known to have used fire,
while in another
part of the world, 'Pithecanthropus erectus' was advancing fast. Our
ancestors are exactly the same ancestors as monkeys and apes. So we
should regard them as very distant cousins not ancestors.

There is nothing tentative about Rosemary. For the time being at least she has worked some things out. "Nought has no permanent place in the number line." She has synthesized what she has been learning about "man," and above all she *reasons* her way towards ideas. In many ways her "pithecanthropus erectus" enjoys the same status as copper sulphate and all that, but she presents it in a way which leaves no doubt that it belongs in her thinking. What Rosemary has been able to do, as her very clear line of thought shows, is to internalize some kind of general audience and to give it her explanations. In "People" she seems to need a few sentences to get her round to this kind of writing, a sort of run-up of looser ideas, but from the sentence, "The differents between humans and animals, etc.", she tightens the organization of her ideas.

The *remaining* question asked at the outset of this section is; do we need writing to live and act together in the way that we need talk? There are kinds of writing which clearly fulfill these functions--many personal letters, the controversies which fill newspapers and books, and all kinds of written information from labels on bottles to encyclopedias. Very little of what children write is of this instrumental kind, though they sometimes have things to say to their teacher and to other children which is genuinely informative. Perhaps more contact with people and life outside school would give rise to more of this. On the other hand writing gives children a chance to withdraw from day-to-day pressing contacts, to work out what they think, to record their doings and to sort out their feelings. They can do this more fully and deliberately. The writing we have been looking at is no ivory tower; it is very much in touch with life. Therefore we can conclude its effect on daily living with others is much more indirect than talk. Indeed in the long run it should have its effect on talk of all kinds.

In the past few years it has become customary to speak of "creative writing" in school and I have deliberately avoided using the term here. It is not that the impetus behind the term has not been on the whole a healthy one, nor that one cannot find teachers using it to

describe excellent written work done by their pupils. It is rather that there is something very unsatisfactory about it which could and, in some cases definitely does, lead to misunderstanding and in turn to the practice of separating out "creative writing" as a special activity quite different from all other writing going on. There are distinctions to be made, as we have seen, but even to imply that there is much writing to be done which is non-creative is to use "creative writing" as a warrant for sterile, copied and half-copied work justified as serving practical ends. This is not the place to get involved in a squabble about labels but it is the place for me to make clear my view that all good language use is in some sense creative and that the term should not be restricted to poems, stories and autobiographical writings. Of course, the whole of this chapter has been implicitly making this point.

Distinctions, however, do have to be made and it would be useful before I look at the next example if I stopped to consider some which are relevant for our purposes. Everyone is aware that language, spoken and written, changes in readily recognizable ways to meet different needs, different situations, different roles and so on. We firmly expect this to be so and would be puzzled and amazed if a textbook of inorganic chemistry sounded like a novel. All sorts of suggestions have been made as to how we might best sort out the essential categories of written language and many teachers seem to have a home-made set which they more or less work to. It is a puzzle to know where they get them from, a puzzle I do not propose to solve. They all needless to say are based on mature adult discourse and tell us nothing about how children learn to use these varieties of language, that is, what route they follow towards them; nor do they provide us with a system for looking at immature kinds of writing which we may reasonably expect primary school children to undertake and later abandon. No sensible teacher will ask an eight year old to explain and defend the program of a political party, but she will readily ask them to tell the story of something important that happened to them. A rough and ready sensible taxonomy is in fact operated. Yet it is my experience that in some schools the bias will be one way, perhaps "informational" writing, and in others another way, perhaps the writing of fantasy stories.

Work in this field has been carried out at University of London Institute of Education by the Writing Research Unit. I do not propose to recapitulate it here but to confine myself to selecting those aspects of the work which seem most relevant to the primary-school. (The Unit has, in fact, been working on writing in the secondary school.)*

*A full account of the work in this field by James Britton and his colleagues can be found in 'What's the use?: a schematic account of language functions,' *Educational Review*, vol. 23, no. 3, June 1971.

First then let us consider more exactly what we mean by *expressive* language, noting in passing that the term has already been used several times in this text in such a way, I hope, as to suggest its meaning even though it has not been strictly defined or discussed. From the very beginnings of their use of language children do not simply express ideas, make statements, ask for information and give orders but *at one and the same time reveal their feelings* about what they are saying. At one extreme this takes the form of expressions of anguish and delight, at the other of special features of the sounds they make (changes in pitch, stress and intonation), their selection of words and the way they order them. This is how we talk to one another most of the time. Sometimes the feelings rise to the surface and are unmistakable, at others they are very subdued and implicit, but always they are part of the orchestration of everyday language. It is only for special purposes that men have taught themselves to do otherwise and great claims are made for the virtues of these linguistic inventions (the objectivity of scientific prose, for example). When children become writers they have to forsake almost all the aid given them by the sound of language and by the response of the listener, but there can be no doubt they do not forsake the expressiveness which they acquired as an inextricable part of learning to speak.

In the general flow of speech in young children with all its expressiveness we can, however, make a broad distinction. We have seen children use language for very practical purposes ranging from getting things done by others (do this, do that) to getting information (What is that?) to giving information (This is . . .) to the solution of problems (That's how to do it). It is also used for less immediately practical purposes to satisfy more general curiosities, to suggest reasons and explanations, to consider alternative possibilities not so much because life is making an immediate and pressing demand nor because the immediate physical environment needs to be controlled, but because much wider intellectual preoccupations have been set in motion (questions of death and cruelty, of human relations and natural phenomena). In all these uses of language we can see quite plainly the effort to understand the world of things, events and people and to act effectively in it, sometimes in a direct way and sometimes via the process of formulating ideas stored for more general use. At the same time we have another use of language which seems to serve no such direct purpose, even to be frivolous and wasteful (if we look at it superficially); that is story-telling, recounting experiences, telling jokes, remembering what things were like or might be like, singing songs. These apparently humble activities differ from the others we have been speaking of in that they are satisfying

activities in their own right, just like painting or playing an instrument. This is not to say they do not play a vital part in understanding the world and in the end do not affect our beliefs and actions very profoundly, but they do so in a more oblique way and they work very differently. In the long run, we might argue, the way they affect our understanding may be more profound, for they are our way of making a totality from our experience. They express how experience tastes to us as individuals and invite others to share this taste. Thus while young children show very clearly in all their writing the imprint of their feelings and attitudes, there is a kind of writing where this becomes paramount, though of course they themselves are largely unaware of this change. I am not suggesting that there is a hard and fast line to be drawn but only that the *balance* shifts. We can see this most clearly when children write about their personal concerns, the textures of their own lives, the events which linger in their minds and anything in the world around them which they wish to incorporate in their model of the world. We might say that in this kind of writing they are *not only responding to the world but responding to their responses*. The balance shifts more dramatically when form is imposed on the writer's material, a form dictated by the pattern of feeling and the material is fashioned into a poem or story. In a nursery rhyme like "Hickory dickory dock" the patterning gives a bold ordering to the simple drama, satisfying expectation with the representation of the ticking clock and surprising it with the mouse's frightened flight from the striking clock.

Before we pass on it might make clearer just what writing is if we show some children using it in the area we have called "personal concerns":

I went to the safari park on Sunday.
I went into the dolphins when they were all playing and jumping up for the ball. Then the lions climbed on top of a car they jumped off and this man came with a pole and he was frightening the lions because they were walking across the road. Then the lions were jumping on our car. Two lions jumped on it was banging the roof then I heard it louder my brother was asleep I was in the back of the car I didn't know what to do. I thought the roof was going to collapse in. Then it was banging and you could feel it falling a bit. I thought they were going to make a big hole and fall right in. I dived under the seat and falled asleep.

David, 5 years

My Dad

My Dad has a beard and sometimes he gets in a rage and he was good at a quarry Manieger and he is good at carpentree and he is fat and his name is peter Manley and when I kiss him at bed-time his beard tikeles me and I like my Dad.

A six year old

Fear

It was a week before I came over to the Junior School. It was evening and I was in bed. Then a horrid thought came to me. Suppose I would not know which class to go to when I went over. I rushed under my bed. I began to feel cold. I sivered. I felt as if my hair was standing striaght up. I curled up. I began to cry. I pulled my pyjamas. I kicked about.

A seven year old

Diana took me to Scatcherd Park to go putting. Diana won. I was 101. I do not no Dianas total Diana got her ball in the holes I beat her once. There was some boys on the green too We did not play nere them. Diana seide I was Good as it was the first time I had plyed on that green. Somehow I thingh Diana cheated somehow. On the other hand she could not have for she gos to the putting green lots of times with frans one of Diana frans cheats If it took her 5 gos she would say it took her 3 gos. I dont think her other friend cheats.

Jimmy, 8 years

Arguments

Always arguing that's my mum or puzzeling over a sum of money of course Dad always says no his hair's too short. It's too long says mam. It's not. It is. It's not. It is. Always arguing! That's my mum and dad. Shall I or shall I not. Or will it be will he won't he. It's all a question of that. Our dog always sticks up for my mum. But lattely he's been sticking up for both. Dad takes me out to play football (around washing-up time) As an excuse for getting out of washing up. Mum doesn't like mini skirts. (I do) Always always arguing. What about? Me or the dog. Mum said "I'm not going to bingo. You are. I'm no. You are. Then she does (to get out of dad's way I suppose) When mum says go to the shop I have to.

Paul, 10 years

Our Street

As it get dark in our street the sun disappears over the houses, then the bright lights come on. Mrs Robinsons voice which is loud and rough echoed over Mrs Briggs shops, "Aaarthuuuuur." If you don' come in a minute you'll get what for." John, Arther and the other lads gather around the lamp in a ring near Mrs Greenwoods house. The houses begin to get dull and mix with the night. And the street becomes full of dark corners, the trees swayed and made funny noises as if someone was swaying on them. As it gets colder you try to get warm. You turn round swiftly to see who's coming down the street.

Alan, 10 years

Confessions

As a small child I allways liked peanuts. Whenever there were peanuts around I asked to have some. The answer was usually "No." I was waiting for my mother to finish her shopping when I noticed a container which held peanuts roasted and hot.
I asked my mother but in vain. The answer was "no."
I looked around. The shop keeper was serving costumers. Slowly I edged my way over. The peanuts became more and more temting. My mouth watered. My fingers were fumbling in and out of each other. Every peanut was big. I felt my eyes grow. My hair stood on end. licking my lip's desperately and eyeing a peanut that hung half off the table, I grabed it quickly. Sweat poured round my cheeks, my ears tingled. Cluching the peanut I looked round. A lady said "can I help you" She kept looking at me. Mother called. My feet shivered I went hot and cold in turns.
As we arrived outside, losened my hold off that now very sticky peanute. I could not bring myself to eat the peanut. Droping it down the gutter, I let go of my breath.

Julia, 11 years

So much for some distinctions which may perhaps make clear why we need to go further than saying that there are three or four kinds of writing (or more) and that each needs to be exercised. Wherever we end up in our theories about writing we still have to take that precarious step from theory to practice. More particularly we have looked at teachers' realizations of their theories, even of those theories they have never made explicit. For we cannot rest content simply with a report of what children have done. A primary school classroom in full flow provides a very strong temptation to the outsider to do just this. The exciting

range of activities, the confidence of young children in making their own decisions, the prevailing mood of self-direction and concentration are all alluring. If we add to this that the teacher is likely to be difficult to find and may be engaged with only one or two pupils, then it is easy to see that one could confine oneself to collecting what children had written without attempting to assess or at least merely to record what part the teacher had played or thought she had played.

THE INDIVIDUAL VOICE

On the inevitable housing estate I visited a school in which the head and staff were grappling with the typical problems of such an environment. In particular they had to face the difficulties of continuous turnover of population and consequently were deeply involved in what is usually called social welfare. Yet the school was a calm place, the children very composed and fully engaged in a wide range of activities. There was little sign of listlessness and lack of concentration. I found Michael, aged ten, who had written a set of poems. He was drawn to the poetry books which were made easily accessible to the children, had borrowed them to take home and begun writing his own. The head and his teacher had been delighted to supply him with more books and encourage him to go on without attempting to constrain or control his themes and language. I quote only a few examples of all that he had written:

High on the Moor

Grouse on the moor early in the spring
The grouse fly back to the moor
With calls of their law and wilderness
So high on the moors with so many words of their laws
On the wide open moors
O heather is in the medal
So high on the moor

Deep Sea

Deep under the sea is darkness
Whales eat tons of seaweed
Do you hear the octopus eat as quietly as he can?
It is five hundred fathams down
submarines are not often see
Thousands of fossils are waiting to be found just lying there
It's lonely and its dark
Fish make old galleons their home

The birds of beauty

O come let us see the birds of beauty
Hark do you hear the Eurasian jay
Chasing and embracing?
Kestrals fly so high in the still, quiet sky
As the days go by.

Death

A wooden box and a handful of fresh flowers means death

Restless

Gazing at the outlines of things
Stumbling through my thoughts
Blind to the future
Tapping a rhythm in my mind
Poem or long rhythm
What does it matter
I can distinguish it
Thoughts rinkle my mind
I see faces of the dead in my solitude

Death of a cancer

When somebody dies of something terrible they go
  delerious
Words come out of their mouth that they do not mean
When the cancer bites it drives you wild
'til it eats you and you die

(written after the death of his grandmother)

Who could have proposed the extraordinary range of themes which this boy undertook for himself? Who could have proposed the high seriousness and experimentation as appropriate for him? Moreover, the poems bring out clearly some of the advantages of writing over talking. So much of what is written in school is difficult to justify. Either it could be talked through to better purpose or is more busywork resorted to often because there are too many pupils in the class or because it lends itself more easily to a certain type of control. But once children can write, the very process of withdrawing from interaction with others gives them a chance to use the freedom from pressure to respond at speed to work over the experiences of their lives. Events, impressions, images, sensations which jostle in confusion can be hammered into a whole which makes sense and which takes a form we cannot manage in spontaneous speech.

This kind of writing shows the young writer sifting, selecting and also evaluating life. The language permits him to do all this together. To be able to do this is the result of slow growth over the years of the capacity to internalize the world including ourselves and others. For the youngest writers, writing can scarcely add very much to the range of their expressive powers since their capacity to internalize language is so limited. We can add that the advantage conferred by the written word, the possibility of scanning back in the *text*, is scarcely available to a young child. It doesn't take long with a six or seven year old to observe that if he is interrupted in his flow of thought he finds difficulty in reading through what he has written and in picking up the lost thought.

By contrast with the writing we have been looking at, a great deal of writing that children do in schools does very little to help them understand themselves. Children cover an enormous amount of paper in some classes writing topic books on aeroplanes, cars, wild flowers and birds they have never seen, historical topics, fashions, etc. etc. It looks very industrious. It's called a library period or research or some such thing. It may be that reading and talking about such matters is thought to be insufficient and that the teacher hopes the content will remain more firmly implanted if the children make "topic books" about it. It may be thought that the personal writing is not sufficient and that the children need to be introduced to other forms of language of a more impersonal nature and of a kind appropriate for future secondary school work. It may be that teachers feel that as children get older they become interested in things further afield and do not wish to confine writing only to personal matters or personally mediated language. But if the attention and imagination have not been engaged, the subject will remain of passing and superficial interest. I read ninety-four pages of a "topic book" on Chichester's travels, written by an eleven year old. He was obviously very absorbed and interested enough to take his book home and continue to write it with considerable perseverance and effort. There is no doubt that an eleven year old would have an investment in such an episode--it has the ingredients of the hero, the battle with the elements, the successful outcome, and so on. It would probably have been unwise to have diverted the child once he had begun on his own marathon task. He stopped at the ninety-fourth page and hadn't actually crossed the Atlantic Ocean with Chichester, which could have been a disappointment to him. How did he come to embark on such a task in the first place? Are there expectations built into the class that would make such tasks acceptable and desirable to children? Has the teacher collaborated in this "escape into reality" rather than help the boy to discover and express

his own meaning through the discipline of his own imagination? It is not that the theme is unworthy or inappropriate but that the imaginative penetration has not occurred.

When children turn the substance of their daily lives into written language it is reasonable to expect that the ways in which they do this will vary. Sometimes they will place in order a simple sequence of events, a mere three or four, with no explicit comments on what they feel to be the significance of them, and yet a meaning emerges strongly which they would have been hard put to it to verbalize:

The television buzzing a misty kind of feeling. Father grumbling at everything, the clock struck twelve. My father and mum slowly trudged up up the stairs. But I waited and lay there for hours and hours and hours.

Martin, 9 years

My brother had a party. David Ian and Garry came to it. They wouldn't let me play. I went upstairs and looked out of the window and saw a bird.

Rose, 10 years

Brief pieces of this kind are a reminder that as children progress up the school there is a tendency for length to be a criterion of achievement. Teachers often feel that three or four lines of writing cannot be enough and that they indicate laziness, lack of concentration or something inadequate. We should be able to acknowledge that children may quite often have said just what they wanted to say and said it well in a few words, and that there is no need to press them for "more detail" or "explicitness." Of course the full meaning of what is being said can never be available to us and we cannot always see the exact experience which has led to what was written, which is perhaps an excellent reason for much more readiness to assume that children are engaged in a serious effort at making sense even if what they write seems obscure.

Sometimes the thread between experience and the language is available to us and we are able to see what transformations are worked upon the material. David was in a class of seven to eight year olds in a city school. They had all seen a starling fall dead, and he wanted to write something but he couldn't manage the spelling, so he dictated it:

I saw a piece of wood
Iced to the ground
All the birds came swarming round
All the birds were singing loudly
One came strutting proudly
Two swans came flying over
Wings flapping with laughter
The trees are blowing
And I see the last leaf fall

No starling. No death. Only a leaf falling. For our own satisfaction as readers we don't need to know about the dead starling but other children dealing with other experience might not have done this for us.

Finally, let us look at one girl for whom writing is not simply one of several ways of expressing herself. For her it is beyond doubt a central means for examining and expressing life. Before setting out the pieces let me emphasize that Nina, the daughter of a colliery worker, is by no means the clean, tidy, little model good girl and she is now in a secondary modern school where, says her primary school head, she is "not settling down very well." In the primary school she was at liberty to write whatever mattered to her and there was always time for her to do that rather than some of the things she never took to, like movement. I am not suggesting that it is surprising that she has all this to say for herself. Anyone who knows children of this age knows they will talk in a similar way. What is surprising is that more of them do not do what she does--write it down. We must ask again, does it get crowded out by haunted houses, "descriptions" and the assemblage of facts? Nina can look life in the eye, wonder about it, weigh it up, take a stand. I believe that in doing this she is changing herself in ways which make possible a changed way of acting in the world:

A foggy morning

When I was coming home from school I had a funny feeling in my tummy. I had a feeling that I was up in the air and that the wind was blowing me with him, and that the houses were like big monsters. It made me feel scared. The trees looked like just plain sticks. It is very dangerous on the roads.

Newspapers

In my opinion I think that newspapers are absolutely rubbish, some people think that the newspaper is marvelous. My next-door neighbor gets a paper every day of the week. You should see the reaction of the neighbor

when the paper comes, she jumps up and smothers her face in it. At our house we do not get papers regularly, we get it, but only when Mammy goes to Mexborough. I think the newspaper could be improved. Some people think there is not enough news in the paper, but the publishers can only put in what has been true. Newspapers should be made a little shorter, and stapled together. It's ever so hard to manipulate them, coming apart in pages and pages.

School dinners

I go home to dinners because I like to see my mum and my pet budgie. I like the change of getting away from school for an hour. If I stayed at school I think I would be liable to get a little sick of the sights of school. School dinners always seem to me rather uninteresting. I have never stayed to school dinners, but that's the way I feel. At home, when I am having dinner there is always a conversation. But at school I suppose, there is no conversation. The walk I like, birds chirruping the sun shining. I would not stay to school dinners because I might feel uneasy eating with other people I do not know. Dinner at home is a friendly and interesting conversation time, I feel at ease with my family. Many of the things that are served in school dinners I do not like. This is mainly why I do not stay. I am contented going home for my dinner. At home there is a friendly atmosphere.

Religion

Honestly, I don't know whether to believe in God or not. I just believe in him because everybody else does. I don't believe that he could do miracles, I think that God said, "Get up and walk," it was not God doing miracles but the person himself. He thought that God was helping him so he tried his hardest to walk, and he could. People nowadays, called Faith Healers try to do what God did, and they often succeed. When I try to fathom out whether there is a God, I get in a muddle with myself. God is kind, understanding and thoughtful. No doubt, when I get older, my ideas will change. God, unlike the devil does not work with a system. God has pure skin, although he is old. He is wise, or at least thought I have sorted it out I get an answer like this "He lives in heaven, he can not do miracles. I do not believe in God." How could he have made the heavens? When I think it over I stick to a certain answer, and then eventually change my mind. No one can say whether there is a God. If you state your opinion on God no one can say "Oh No there is a God you know, you are wrong". because no one knows.

The most important day

Everyone is excited, but most of all the Bride. She is all of a jitter, and father says, trying to cheer her up, "That won't do dear, having butterflies on your wedding day."
The Bridegroom is sitting calmly and serenely at home, reading the Evening Post with the best man. It is time to set off. They both set off at the same time, and arrived at the Church at the same time. In two ticks the service is over, and they are Husband and wife. Mother is sniffling, but doesn't want anyone to notice her. Father makes a speech, this speech goes on for some fifteen minutes, with quite a few embarrassing remarks for the Bride and Bridegroom. They are learning more about each other in fifteen minutes that they would have done in forty years of marriage. Their faces are a treat to watch. Each one in turn goes red and blushing furiously. But when all cools down, it wasn't such a bad day after all, was it?

Do adults get you down?

Somehow grown ups don't seem to care about children. Although they don't know it, children also have egos, which are much more easily bruised than theirs. No one will ever listen to children--they think we're somewhat feeble minded, but we aren't. Grown-ups always think they know best, just because ther're over twenty-one. Mum or Dad will make a very embarrassing remark in public about the child even though the child is embarrassed or hurt by that remark, she will say nothing. Then the parents take advantage and do it more often. Adults don't seem to realize that children have got feelings. We're not made of iron you know, we're made of flesh and blood just like grown-up. Grown-ups think that they have a name to live up to. Children are quite good natured in Company. But really in their minds they are slowly developing a resentment against their parents, but in company they dare not say anything. Grown-ups are too big headed. They won't listen to us, they think that we talk utter rubbish: More often than not children are right but grown-ups think they know best. They often break promises, and think no more about it. After saying an embarrassing remark and hurting our dignity, they laugh it off. But in most cases, it's a case of the kettle calling the pan black; Grown-ups go rambling on at sixty miles an hour talking a load of intellectual tripe, and then after they have finished everybody thinks them terribly clever and well educated. While at home, before they go visiting, they are rehearsing every word off by heart in the English Dictionary. Not knowing half of what they are talking about. Let's face it in they eyes of adults wer're just little specks of dust.

Even though this chapter is concerned with children's writing, it needs constant reiteration that the questions we should be asking are, "What are the children doing?" and "What sort of talk should be going on?" rather than "What kinds of writing have we covered?". The more detailed the children's observation of snails or the birth of a calf or the more concerned and committed they are to the measurement of fox gloves, the more likely they are to reach an understanding of the object they are describing. The same is true of children writing about themselves and the people around them. Paradoxically the greater the personal involvement, the more likely we are to reach a more objective view of life. Snails that have been examined with absorbed concentration are more likely to take on an independent existence than if we are constantly dictating to children to turn them into objects of fantasy, and the closer a child's observation of a father making a polystyrene fish the more likely he will be to reach a sympathy and understanding of a parent as a person separate in his own right.

I do not wish to give the impression that all the teacher has to do is to feel sympathetic and accepting of the child's point of view and then the rest will follow. It doesn't. Such an impression would do scant justice to the work of the teachers I have quoted. There are enough schools of quality for us to know that it is possible for schools to contribute an extraordinary amount to young children's development. There are many, many primary schools where the children are accepted. They are happy, the atmosphere is amiable and congenial, but it is only the minority of schools that add something very powerful and very decisive to children's lives. Children belong in their homes, with their parents, with their community. It takes a great deal for the institution of a school to add something to all that is of such vital importance to a child. Yet there are schools and teachers who are doing precisely this. Now that we know that such things are possible and can see the unmistakable evidence, we can see that some schools do much more than make children happy and welcome: they actually transform their ways of thinking and feeling. Nowhere is this seen so clearly as in children's writing. For most children this is nurtured by the school and the school alone. Time was when this was taken to mean training in the penmanship which belonged with the narrowest concepts of literacy. Now we can see it as the development of a new medium of expression with its own unique possibilities for enabling children to understand and act in their world.

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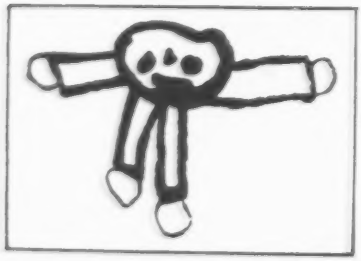

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